OTHER WORLDS

FEBRUARY
1953
35¢

TEMPLE • WILLIAMS • de CAMP • SHAVER

The People Who Make OTHER WORLDS

No. 10

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

IN RESPONSE to our request for a photo and the story of his life, Mr. Temple sent us the above picture and the rather meager information that he was "born in London and still living on the outskirts thereof, since having absentmindedly acquired a wife and two children."

Fortunately for us, he waxed slightly more eloquent on the subject of science-fiction writing. Being of a lazy turn of mind today (and also because we usually have to pay Temple for wordage but this we get for free) we'll present the story as it was told to us.

"Before the war I worked at the London Stock Exchange and in between booms wrote s-f yarns appearing in SUPER SCIENCE STORIES, AMAZING STORIES, and the British TALES OF WONDER. At the same time I edited the Journal of the British Interplanetary Society (now solemnly listed as 'a learned body' in staid, official directories) and—hardest task of all—shared a flat with near-genius Arthur C. Clarke. The Clarke-Temple menage was the center of British s-f before the bombs began to fall and many a fan-mag was duplicated there, much wild and visionary talk went on into the small hours and quiet flowed the beer.

"But then Temple became a Desert Rat in the British 8th Army, writing an s-f novel while ducking shells and mortar bombs. The first incomplete MS of this foxhole novel was lost in a skirmish with Rommel's tanks and probably still lies somewhere in the

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OTHER WORLDS

STORIES

FEATURES

FEBRUARY

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ISSUE No. 26

Front Cover:
Malcolm H. Smith

Back Cover:
J. Allen St. John

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....Editorial...

THIS editorial marks a sort of milestone. And in order to explain, we're going to start it off by printing a letter we got from an old friend. It goes this way:

Dear Bea:

Here it is. It isn't space-opera; it isn't horse-opera; it may not even be science-fiction. In fact, I don't know what it is, unless you could call it a pseudo-historical extravaganza. The highbrows, both natural and synthetic, who are having so much fun kicking my other stuff around, ought to have a field-day with this—if they deign to notice it at all. However, I think you have a lot of readers like me, who read SF magazines for fun, not to study psychological aberrations and frustrations; and I, personally, like it.

As ever,
Doc

Now, if you haven't already guessed, this letter is from Skylark Smith, Edward E. Smith, Ph.D., the best loved writer of all science-fiction, good old "Doc" Smith. And as you can guess from the letter, it accompanied a manuscript. Doc's first appearance in *Other Worlds,* and believe it or not, if our memory serves us correctly, the *only* story editor Rap has ever bought from the old master! So, you see where it marks a milestone.

Next issue you'll get to read this story, and we hope you like it as much as Doc (and we)!

Doc's working hard on a new novel. We can expect it to be finished any year now. And when it's finished, we hope to be able to present it to our readers. And we'll personally poison the rival editor who tries to steal it away from us.

There's a new deal coming up in OW in coming issues. March will keep up the deal that begins in this issue with William F. Temple (or rather, began with Eric Frank Russell in the January issue). This new deal isn't exactly a shuffle of the deck, but a sort of game of murder. No cards, only needles. We are embarking on a very enjoyable pastime of sticking needles in all our competitors. We are going to steal every good author in the field by hook or crook. And at the same time, keep all our own good ones. (Wilson, who threw that tomato!)

Anyway, no single issue will pass by without at least one big name author on our contents pages, and with some of his *best* work, not just his name. Smith, de Camp, Gibson, and even Palmer—in the next issue. And in April, MYSHKIN!

APRIL! No fooling, that issue! Something big! MYSHKIN. We find ourselves muttering the word in our sleep. *Myshkin.* A word to conjure with. 65,000 words all in one story, in one single issue! Plus three or four other stories. An addition of 33% more words than in the usual issue. All to bring you MYSHKIN—and a writer you'll NEVER forget . . . and one you've seen before with some of the greatest classics in science fiction. We'd tell you his name right now, but you'd die of suspense. Just be thankful we didn't make a serial out of this new novel. We only hope you can take both barrels at once! It'll blast you, no kidding.

Certain of our readers would say we are blowing horns about our pets again. Well, this writer isn't a pet of ours. Maybe we discovered him, but many times we've wished we hadn't. Why? Well, he's too big for one editor to handle. Getting this novel from him cost us quarts of real blood, and we'll swear he used it to oil his typewriter! For a time, we thought he was drinking it!

But by MYSHKIN, it was worth it! Come April issue, you'll see . . .

James McConnell, who won our "three dirty words" contest some time ago, turned around and sold to *Astounding* and *Galaxy*. When we heard of it, we were furious. So furious we demanded that he accept our check for a story he finally condescended to send us. We think he sent us his best story, and we like to be last in a queue like that. Anyway, watch for McConnell—he's worth waiting for.

Last Wednesday (October 29) Kenneth Arnold landed his famous plane in our pasture, all unexpected-like. He brought his wife with him, and spent three days with us on the farm. On the second day we impressed him into helping us work on our dam, and then we had him fly us over the farm so we could take pictures. While aloft—you guessed it!—we did *not* see any flying saucers. But Ken did bring us a lot of mighty sensational news. Co-incidentally, this same week's *Quick* (or was it *Focus?*) forecast that within sixty days the saucer-boys who think they are either Russia or Interplanetary will have red faces, because an announcement will be forthcoming. Well, the news Ken brought us makes this forecast sort of laughable. And when it is made, just bear in mind that the new revelation is NOT the answer to the flying saucers.

Funniest part of Ken's visit was when Richard Shaver came rattling up in his old car, and jumped out ready for his first ride in a plane. There he was, the old cavern spaceship master, never been up in the air before! Well, when we saw Ken looping the plane (and he sure did a graceful job of it!) we pictured the great dero-fighter turning green—but you know, he didn't! Deroes, you had your chance! You could have shot Dick down with a ray. Well, that's what comes of sleeping over

(Continued on page 140)

FIELD of BATTLE

By William F. Temple

At last the cloud blanket of Venus had been penetrated. But from the very instant of penetration, death began to leap at the explorers from every side.

INSIDE the space-ship the light was becoming unbearably bright. Each of the crew felt that he was standing at the focus point of a score of naked arc lights. Meter dials shone like mirrors and defied reading. Hand-rails blazed like rods of white fire, and fingers hesitated to grip them. But it was all light, nothing more. The temperature hadn't risen

by one degree, even though they were twenty-six million miles nearer the sun than their native Earth. The heating of the ship was controlled by a thermocouple.

Captain J. Freiburg shielded the chronometer from the glare and saw that, at the present rate of deceleration, the ship would reach, tail first, the outer wisps of the clouds of Venus in approximately fourteen minutes.

He said into the mike: "Fasten glare shields."

The mate's voice, from the loudspeaker, acknowledged the order.

The skipper could reach his cabin's solitary port-hole from his seat. With a heavy hand he swung the disk of amber to cover the quartz and fastened it with a snap. The amalgamated glare from Venus's albedo and the magnified sun itself was softened into a cool lemon light.

Once, when he was a small boy, he was on an Atlantic liner which ran into a heavy sea-mist when there was other shipping in the vicinity. The liner had crawled along, hooting, and from out of the blank white curtain, which hid even the sea, came other warning hoots. At the time he thought of the Captain on the bridge, and the weight of responsibility he was bearing, and he didn't envy him. But he trusted him. The skipper, he thought, wouldn't hold such a position if he weren't equal to the responsibility. They'd come through all right, he thought. And they did.

Now he himself was the Captain, with his ship about to enter impenetrable cloud. He looked at the TV screen and saw only whirling whiteness. There was a parallel, but with an important difference. He couldn't stop his ship nor reverse it. He'd had to hand over to the computor which dealt with the mass and speed of the ship, the mass of Venus, and the readings of the radar altimeter.

But the altimeter, at this distance, could give only rough readings. There was solid land beneath the clouds, but the altimeter needle flickered back indecisively over divisions marking hundreds of yards. To be only one hundred yards out could be equivalent to dropping the ship to the ground from a height of 255 feet on Earth. It wouldn't do it much good nor the crew either.

Of course, that was if the clouds extended right to the ground, as by current theory they did. But if the ship broke through with, say, a mile of clear atmosphere to spare, he could see exactly what the altimeter couldn't tell him exactly, and so bring down the ship by manual control. He wished like hell he could do that. He didn't mind the responsibility so long as he had complete control. He trusted himself but not his luck.

The fact that the crew knew he was flying blindly by instruments didn't matter. Knowledge and belief were two different things. They still believed that he, personally, was responsible for their safety.

In anything like a gamble he had no luck. He'd once piled a ship on launching because he took a gamble with the weather: the storm broke at just the wrong moment. There were

innumerable instances in space where he'd come near disaster not through lack of skill but lack of luck.

Which was why he'd always tried to hush up the fact that the "J" in his name stood for "Jonah."

He looked again at the blank video screen, thought of his TV set at home with the armchair and slippers and pipe-rack beside it, sighed, and decided that if he survived this coming adventure, he'd retire. He was getting too old for pioneering.

He was glad when George Starkey came in, very slowly, sagging a bit at the knees and clinging to the handrail. Starkey was young, and had none of the fears and pessimism of age.

"Well, Skip, nearly there."

There was no disciplining Starkey. He wasn't one of the crew. He was a professional explorer, tenacious, resourceful—and lucky. He'd done a lot of good work on Mars—good enough to qualify him for this first attempt on Venus. He had the unquenchable thirst to know what was on the other side of the hill. Sheer curiosity gave him unflagging energy. He also, the Captain reflected, had energy to spare for walking about the ship when it was under 2 *g* and for making obvious and unnecessary remarks.

The Captain nodded briefly and turned back to the screen.

George Starkey looked at the infrared visi-plate. It showed nothing much: just vague, spotty shadows.

"Not much help," he commented. "Still, it shows there's land there and not water. Guess the clouds must go all the way down if that's the best the infra-red can do."

"Maybe. Or maybe the clouds are thick with floating particles."

"Dust?"

"Or chemicals. There's carbon dioxide in them—but what else?"

George shrugged. 'We'll soon know when Firkin gets a specimen."

He could stand no longer, and sank into a sprung chair. The braking drive was steadily increasing.

The Captain looked at the altimeter again. "Ten minutes—and then we shan't be able to see where we're going."

George grinned. "I've not been able to see that for the last ten minutes."

It was becoming hard to open one's jaws for talking now, and both fell silent.

The Captain thought back to his armchair and slippers on faraway Earth, and George thought forward to Venus. He felt one hundred per cent alive with excitement and anticipation. Mars had been interesting, but the canals were a bad let down. They were natural fissures, nothing more, and there'd been no sign of life above the insect level. It was a flat, featureless landscape, and there wasn't much to add to the astronomers' maps.

But Venus was something again. Here was complete mystery. Apart from the Moon, it was Earth's nearest neighbor. Almost the same size, a sister planet, yet wearing always a mask of cloud. He'd longed to get behind the mask, and now he was going to do it. Alive or dead.

The Captain stared at the dull infra-red screen and at the glowing green radar screen, trying to match the hints of contours. His fear was of mountain peaks. They must try for a level area. If the screens were to be believed, there were no undue prominences immediately below them.

One might be able to do a little with the side-jets beyond the clouds, later. Meantime, you could only sit and let the increasing pressure try to wrap the chair around you and push your shoulders up over your ears.

A frozen age passed. It was quite five minutes long.

Then they were in the clouds. By moving his eyes (it was all but impossible to turn his head) Captain Freiburg could watch all the screens and the port-hole. The yellow light began to fade into amber. It was like dusk falling rapidly. The selenium cell responded and did its duty: the electric lights came on. Beyond the glare shield the daylight faded to a dull glow. The clouds were something more substantial than mere water vapour.

They were 17,000 yards up when the first explosion happened. A flash somewhere outside sent a brief yellow flare into the cabin. The ship shook, and seemed to jump sideways with a bang. The gyroscopes pulled it back to balance.

Then it happened again. And again. Yellow flashes and the ship jumping this way and that, and the thuds of the explosions outside.

It was horrible to have to sit there, helpless, unable to move or say anything. They exchanged wordless questions with their eyes. What is it? What's happening?

The Captain thought: I've misread the screens. I'm trying to put her down on an active volcano. Just my luck.

George thought: What are these clouds made of? Have we started a chemical reaction in them through friction?

There was another flash, and a jar. Then it began to get lighter outside. The Captain was aware of it although he was keeping his eyes on the altimeter now.

11,000 yards.

They were falling through the underside of the clouds ever more slowly. He stole a look at the video screen: the surface of Venus was visible, in a dull gray light, like a rainy afternoon. There were mountains in the distances, whole ranges of them, white-capped. Below was a great rolling plain, dun-colored, with patches of dirty green.

In the moment of his glance, the video registered a white flash some distance below and away, and from the flash a ball of black smoke sprang, opened, and broke. The ship's jets tore into the black wisps, shredding them.

Then he understood. The flashes were shell-bursts. They were being fired at.

He took the shock with calm. He could see what he was doing now, and was unafraid.

His foot eased itself onto the pedal

controlling the speed of ejection. He was going to interfere, and to hell with the computer. The ship, which had been slowing, dropped suddenly like an elevator beneath their feet. The overplus of *g* lifted from them momentarily.

"Going to land?" jerked George.

"Have to." Freiburg hadn't time to explain why you couldn't reverse a rocket in mid-air and have it lift you out of range. The only chance was this sudden duck under, and a hope that the guns couldn't reach you on the ground. Perhaps there was a dip or a hollow. . .

He hadn't time, though, even to think about looking for one. They were approaching the ground much too fast. His foot moved again on the pedal and the impetus was checked with a suddenness which drove the air from their lungs with short, queer groans.

The jolt threw the Captain's foot off the pedal. Breathing hard, he tried to regain control. The ground was fearfully near. He got in a last burst before they hit it. It was just enough to save their lives. The ship landed with a jar that shook them from their chairs.

It remained perfectly vertical and motionless. To a layman everything might have seemed quite all right. But the crew knew just what such an impact must have done to the ship's fins. And it was suicide to take off with even one of those fins bent an inch out of the straight.

Captain Jonah had wrecked another ship.

The wrecker lay there for a while with his eyes shut, in an abyss of misery. George came crawling across to him, began to feel his limbs. He opened his eyes and sat up wearily.

"I'm all right, George." It was the first time he'd used the explorer's first name. He thought: Who am I to claim any sort of authority?

George regarded him critically.

"Don't look so worried, Skip. You're not blaming yourself for this?"

"I—"

"They were shelling us, weren't they?"

"That's what it looked like."

"Okay, then, you did the only thing. You saved us. We're only a little bent, when we might have been blasted to pieces."

The Captain shrugged, and got up. He reached for the mike.

"How's everyhody, Mister? Anyone hurt?"

The mate's voice came back just a little shakily: "All okay here. I don't know about Firkin—I'll go along and check."

"Right."

George pulled back the glare screen and looked out at Venus. It was very quiet and still out there. The gray clouds hung high overhead, unbroken in any direction, in the distances dulling mistily almost to blackness. It looked as though at any moment the rain was going to fall like a cataract. Yet the earth appeared dry and cracked. It was yellow-brown and hard, with patches of thin grass here and there, and it was pockmarked

with craters, five, ten, twenty yards in diameter. There was no sign of habitation or of any living thing. The light was too bad to see the horizon distinctly, but a darker blur seemed to lie along it.

The Captain looked over George's shoulder.

"A depressing outlook," said George, presently.

"You said it," said Freiburg, heavily.

The loudspeaker clicked and came alive. The mate's voice was still shaky. "Sir, Firkin appears to be dead."

The Captain felt another load laid on his shoulders. A flame of resentment flickered.

"Why 'appears'? Can't you tell? What happened?"

"I think you'd better come along to his cabin, sir, at once."

"Coming."

The Captain hadn't liked Firkin as a person, and as a person he was no loss. An opinionated, egocentric bore and whiner, alternately boasting or beefing. But a competent and conscientious analytic chemist, and invaluable on a trip like this.

George followed the skipper along the passages, down the ladder. The mate stood guard at Firkin's door, and he looked worried.

"Don't go in, sir. Just look through the peep-hole."

Firkin's cabin, which was also his laboratory, was airtight. In it he carried out his analyses of planetary atmosphere. There was a small glass panel in the door and you had to tap and get his indicated O.K. before you went in. He'd likely be wearing a pressure helmet, while you were unprotected, and you never knew what might have seeped in through the air-lock or out of the specimen bottle.

The Captain looked. Firkin wasn't wearing his helmet, so he hadn't started analyzing. Now he never would. He lay on his back, very still, face and body contorted. His mouth was half-open and so were his eyes. His face was congested, almost black. There was wet blood over his chin, and there seemed to be spots of it on the floor. It wasn't easy to be sure, because a thin white mist swirled about the cabin like cigarette smoke, and visibility wasn't good.

But two things were plain. The broken quartz specimen bottle at his side. The jagged slit in the outer wall of the cabin.

"What do you think of it, George?" asked the Captain.

George peered. "Looks like he captured a specimen of the cloud stratum all right, as per plan, but a shell splinter got in and broke the bottle under his nose. And it looks like that cloud-stuff is poisonous—he's been coughing blood."

"Yes. And there's still some gas in there—you can see it. You did a good job, Mister, by stopping us at the door. The only thing now is—how the devil are we going to tell if the atmosphere outside is breathable or not?"

"I think it is, sir," said the mate. "At least, it's not poisonous. Look

along here."

He led them down the passage to where there was another rent in the outer wall. It was nearly three inches wide and you could see Venus through it.

"I guess that hit registered when we got below the clouds," said the mate. "But it don't seem to have made any difference."

George put his fingers over the hole. He could feel a steady inflow. He put his nose near the aperture, sniffed.

"Careful," the skipper warned.

"It's all right—just air, apparently. But the pressure's rather more than fifteen pounds to the square inch, I'd say, and it's beginning to even up in here."

"Well, that's something on the credit side at last. Looks like we shan't need spacesuits . . . How's the radio, Mister? Has Sparks got through again yet?"

"No, sir. That . . . crash landing smashed the set up quite a bit. He's working on it."

"Aw, hell." The nearer they'd got to the sun and its wavering stream of electrons, the worse radio communication with the Earth had been. Finally, static had drowned it out altogether. He was barred even from the small triumph of announcing the landing on Venus, but, on the other hand, he hadn't to reveal what a mess he'd made of it. He said, irritably: "Let's go outside and assess the damage."

The air out there was breathable, all right, but the density weighed on you a bit at first. It pressed against the eardrums and everyone's voices sounded far too loud. In some way it and the gray light and the lowering clouds offset the slight lift which the lesser gravitation gave you. The Captain regarded the crumpled fins glumly.

"More than a week's work," he said.

George had brought his collapsible telescope and was staring round the horizon with it. "High mountains in that direction," he said. "Fifty miles off or more, I'd say. So far as I can see, all the rest looks like this—a plain."

"A plain," grunted the Captain. "Yes, and a battlefield. These depressions look like shell craters to me. At a guess, the Venusians are where we were half a century or more ago—on a pretty low level. We'll be lucky if we get out of this in one piece."

George snapped his telescope shut and looked at the skipper thoughtfully. What kind of talk was this, about getting out, when they'd only just got there?

Three other members of the crew came climbing down now to sample Venus. That left only the radio operator still in the ship, still struggling with his set. Everyone started wandering about examining the ground for any sign worth interest.

The Captain searched one of the bigger craters and found steel fragments of shell or bomb casing. There'd been a war on around here, sure enough. Under their cloud canopy the Venusians seemed to have been paralleling the Earthlings rather

too closely.

George shouted and beckoned from a hundred yards off. The Captain went over. George pointed and said: "What d'you make of that?"

There was a perfectly straight slit along the ground, only two inches wide. There seemed no end to it. It led off unbroken in either direction as far as the eye could see, straight as a ruled line.

"I've followed it for several hundred yards. It just goes on and on," said George.

The skipper knelt and probed it. It was nearly a foot deep, the sides of hard-pressed earth narrowing down uniformly until they met along a wafer-thin groove.

"Queer," he said. "Looks as though someone's drawn a giant knife across the landscape. Are there any parallel marks of any kind?"

"I can't see any."

"Then how the devil does the knife hold up? I mean, if it were a sort of plow, there should be the marks of wheels or—or—*something* around here."

"Well, there aren't, Skip."

"What's it supposed to be? A boundary line?"

"Maybe. I don't know. I guess the only way to find out is to follow the line until we bump into whatever made it."

"I'll think about it, George. Maybe it'll be a better idea than your going around in that helicopter when we know there are A.A. guns around. If you kept to the ground and along the line, at least we could follow your trail if need be. But I think we'd better keep together here for a bit, and let the natives approach *us*. They seem to be hostile, and we may need all hands here to beat off a possible attack. We'll set up a command post in one of these craters—I've a notion we'll be safer below ground—"

He broke off. From somewhere far off came a thin, keening wail, getting louder. The crew started to shout and point. There was something moving out there on the plain.

"Your telescope!" snapped the skipper, and George passed it to him. Even through the telescope the thing racing towards them was not easy to see in the poor light, especially as it was almost edge on. The Captain had once seen the wheel of a racing car come off and go bowling on by itself at a hundred miles an hour. Something like that was coming along the ground in their direction at about the same speed, but it was some twenty feet in diameter. An unattached wheel of solid, gleaming metal tapering down from the hub to an edge of extreme thinness. It was like the wheel of an enormous bacon-slicer, run amok.

"Everybody down in the craters!" bawled the skipper.

The rising scream of the wheel's approach all but drowned his voice. He gesticulated frantically and the crew began running for the holes. When he saw they were safe, he ran with George at his side, to the nearest crater. It was pretty shallow, but if the wheel came their way its speed might carry it over them: he'd no

doubt this frightening thing had cut that track, but that track was only a foot deep.

The scream of the wheel made the air quiver now, and the ground seemed to be quivering in sympathy. In one way the skipper was glad: it camouflaged his own quivering. The pair lay there with their heads down waiting for it to pass. But the howling continued, deafeningly, accompanied by a secondary, steady swishing noise, like that of an electric fan.

A minute passed. The wheel, too, should have passed in that time. But the sounds of it and the shaking feel of its passage continued.

Slowly, circumspectly, they lifted their heads and peeped. The wheel was running in a wide circle about them and the whole group of craters, and the ship itself appeared to be the center of the circle. So swiftly did the wheel pursue its circular course that there seemed to be dozens of blurred wheels chasing themselves around, forming a hazy, glimmering barrier twenty feet high.

George yelled: "It's got stuck in a groove!"

The skipper didn't know whether that was supposed to be a joke or not, and didn't bother to consider it. He bellowed back: "Come with me!"

He started running back to the ship. George jumped out of the crater and ran over the shaking ground after him. Heads popped out of craters here and there and watched them inquiringly. The skipper waved them back.

Inside the ship it was a little quieter.

"Get Sparks—bring him down to the armory," gasped the skipper.

George nodded. He found the radio-op. staring out of his port-hole and trying to make sense of the scene outside. On the way down he told him about the wheel.

The skipper was getting out the tripod and light barrel of a bazooka. "I'll take this," he said. "Get a box of shells each and follow me."

The boxes weighed over forty pounds each on Earth and only a little less here. As George staggered with his down the passages, he called: "Have you spotted 'em, Skip?"

"Who?"

"I don't know. The Venusians, I suppose. Whoever's guiding the wheel."

"No. I'm going to have a shot at the wheel itself."

"Will it do much good?"

"It might stop this horrible din," said the skipper, grimly.

It smote their ears with full power again as they left the ship. The Captain started setting up the tripod a few yards away. George and Sparks dumped their boxes, opened them, and prepared the rocket shells.

It might have been his fancy, but George thought the wheel had slackened speed just a little. At least, there didn't seem quite so many wheels whirring around the perimeter. But that perimeter was still plainly impassable. However fast you tried to dash across it, before you were halfway over the groove that flashing

wheel would have come full circle and sliced you in two.

The skipper was having trouble with the tripod, but waved away his proffered help impatiently.

The radio-op. was still fascinated by the wheel. He bawled in George's ear: "I think it's closing in on us."

George started and looked more intently at the base of the blurred wall. Yes, there was a groove, practically a trench, over two feet wide now, and very slowly widening towards them. The keen edge of the wheel was paring its way inwards.

He thought of Poe's *The Pit and the Pendulum*—and was no happier for the thought. He wished the wheel would stand still for a moment so that he could get a good look at it. The skipper grabbed his ankle, tugged it.

"The shells!" he roared. "Quick-firing drill!"

George and Sparks quickly laid the eight shells in a line. The bazooka had an automatic firing device: it would fire the shells as fast as you fed them in.

The skipper opened fire at the center of the moving, and yet seemingly stationary, wall, on a level with the hub. George and Sparks handed him the rocket shells rapidly and efficiently.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz! Whizz!

Trailing fire and smoke the first four shells went darting out of the circle. They passed through the wall as though it were smoke, landing and bursting five hundred yards beyond it.

The skipper bit his lip, then let the last four go.

Whizz! Whizz! Whizz! Whi—

Crash!

They glimpsed a mid-air explosion and flung themselves flat as bits of shrapnel moaned and whirred about them and thudded into the earth. The very last one had scored a hit. The howl had lost half its power suddenly.

Cautiously, they looked up. The wall of steel was still there, but not quite so solidly. You could glimpse the disk of its sole component spinning around with a band of daylight now encircling the hub. They'd blown a hole through the wheel near the hub—the rotary motion made it look like a band.

And the wheel had been thrust back against the far side of the trench it was cutting.

Before anyone could say a word, there was a roar like an express train coming, and suddenly a great cloud of black smoke burst with a splintering concussion thirty yards behind them. Only the body of the ship between it and them saved them. Shell fragments rushed through the air with ripping sounds that made their own brief shower of shrapnel sound by comparison mere bits of tinkling glass.

They didn't wait for the skipper to tell them what to do this time. They dashed for a deep crater and flung themselves into it. The skipper came crawling after them.

Then all hell broke loose.

Shells came shrieking down in a

mad race all about them. The ground jolted and jumped continuously, throwing them inches in the air. George was on his side, on his stomach, on his back, on the skipper's back, on his face again with Sparks half across him: they were being rattled in their crater like dice in a box. Thick clouds of pungent, yellow gas came swirling in. The smell of burnt powder was everywhere, and the shrapnel fell like hail.

It seemed to last an age. Then it stopped, but their ears were still singing from the battering they'd had, and they didn't notice the cessation at once. Then slowly the sound of the wheel took over again. It had fallen in pitch now, was only a kind of whirring drone.

"Phew!" Someone doesn't like us," said George, presently. He put his hand to his cheek and found it wet with cold sweat.

Sparks made no comment. He'd bitten his lip badly, and was dabbing at it with a bloody handkerchief. The skipper inched his nose over the lip of the crater, and tried futilely to wave some of the gas away.

"Can't see a thing," he said. "Venus, the Goddess of Love, eh? We sure had a loving welcome . . . Ah, it's clearing a bit . . . There's something moving out there. Got your telescope, George?"

George passed it up. There was a distant grinding sound, audible above the wheel's drone.

"Tanks," said the skipper, peering. "Old-fashioned tanks, with guns on 'em." He turned the telescope slowly, scanning every direction. "We're surrounded by them," he said, presently. "They're closing in on us. Coming in for the kill."

"I'LL get the bazooka," said George.

"No use," said the radio-op. indistinctly. He'd peeped over the rear edge of the crater. "It got a direct hit. It's in fifty pieces, and most of 'em aren't there."

"There's another in the ship," said George, starting up.

"Hold it!" said the skipper, authoritatively. "The barrage may come down again at any moment and catch you. It's not worth it. I've counted twenty-five tanks out there, and there's some other huge, queer thing behind them—Have a look, George. See what you can make of it."

George took the telescope. The wheel, continually passing across the line of vision like the shutter of a movie projector, made everything look flickery. But you could see the circle of tanks, with wide caterpillar treads and very squat turrets, about half a mile off. They were low-built things, seeming to hug the ground. Sixty-tonners, George guessed. They were converging slowly, gun muzzles aimed directly at the ship.

Behind them a sort of huge torpedo on wheels was skirmishing around. It was a hundred feet long at least, with a pointed nose, cylindrical body, and back-projecting fins. It was made of dull metal, and darted swiftly over the ground on sheathed wheels. A thin, short streamer of

white-hot gas flowed from its tail.

"Rocket-propelled," commented George. "I'd guess it's a traveling, armored H.Q., directing operations on the field. Why, it's near as big as our own ship!"

"Yes," said the skipper. "I think it's time to wave the white flag. We haven't a chance, and we didn't come here to fight them, anyway . . . H'm, the tanks have all stopped moving. What now?"

As they waited, tensely, the wheel's note, which had been falling, died about them. Even the secondary swishing noise, which was the sound of its keen edge cutting the air, fell to a sigh. It was bowling ever more slowly around. It began to wobble as it ran. They could see the hole in it distinctly now.

Then it heeled over and fell on its side, all momentum gone. It was still.

"It's served its purpose," said the skipper, taking off his jacket. "And that was to pin us down in the target area until the guns could be brought to bear. Did you see the air flutes on the hub? We'd blown 'em off on this side, but they're intact on the other side. That's where the howl came from—to demoralize us and petrify us. *Banzai!*"

"I don't think I'm gonna like these Venusians," said the radio-op. carefully. His lip had stopped bleeding, and he didn't want to start it off again.

"All the same, we'll have to try to be friendly," said the Captain. "Getting tough isn't going to help us get any place."

He'd got his white shirt off now. He draped it over the end of the telescope and waved it over the lip of the crater.

"That's a purely Terrestrial custom," said George. "It probably doesn't mean a thing here."

Bang! Bang! Bang! Three tank shells, on a flat trajectory, arrived before the sound of their passage. They burst near the base of the ship.

The skipper snatched his shirt back. "It means something, all right," he said, grimly. "The wrong thing."

Sparks made an inarticulate noise, and gasped: "The ship!"

They turned. The shell-bursts had loosened from the earth the battered fins of the space-ship. It groaned and began to cant. It was like the Tower of Pisa coming away from its foundations.

"It's going!" exclaimed George. Luckily, in relation to them it was falling sideways. It came down with an almighty crash, bounced once and rolled a couple of yards. The dust billowed up around it in a long, brown cloud, then slowly settled. The fallen ship lay as still as the fallen wheel.

The skipper used his shirt to mop his brow.

"That, I think, has put the finishing touch to your set, Sparks," he said.

The radio-op. nodded. His lower lip was bleeding once more, because he'd bitten it again in the same place.

Then they all jerked their heads the other way, because a roaring sound started way out on the plain.

"Gosh!" said the skipper. "This is no place for nerve cases. I'm getting the jitters. What the hell is it now?"

"The armored H.Q.," said George, looking. "It's coming this way like a bullet."

They all looked. The great torpedo on wheels came hurtling head on towards them, its jets roaring. They could see only its blind pointed nose. It sped through the circle of stationary tanks, and the ground began to shake under its iron wheels.

"Down," said the skipper, almost wearily. He was getting sick of being in a sort of recurrent earthquake, bobbing up and down like a jack-in-the box, being assailed by ear-shattering noises and uninvited missiles. The falling of the ship, his charge, had been the last straw, bringing him near cynical despair.

The roaring stopped, was supplanted by a high squealing, like huge brakes being applied. There came a silence. They were about to lift their heads again, when the grinding of twenty-five tanks moving at once grated through the heavy air.

George looked along the ground, caught the skipper's glazing eye, and grinned at him wryly. The skipper tried to grin back, and failed. His expression said: "How much longer can this go on?"

It wasn't for much longer. After a few seconds, silence came again so suddenly that it seemed to have a noise of its own. This time the skipper was too apathetic to move. He lay there waiting dully for the next assault. The radio-op. lay beside him with his red-soaked handkerchief pressed to the lower half of his face.

Cautiously, George stole a look outside. There was a new kind of shock awaiting him. All the tanks had turned in their tracks and were facing outwards, their long guns radiating like wheel-spokes. To the center of the circle they presented their seemingly unprotected backs.

The great wheeled ship also presented its rear. It stood about two hundred yards off, and the only thing moving about it was a slight heat haze arising from its tail. No one was visible. Nothing but the haze moved anywhere. The gray clouds hung motionless over a picture of still life painted in low tones.

George spurred the reluctant skipper into taking a look.

The Captain grunted, gazing from under lowered, cynical lids. "Oh, I see, it's a game. They want us to chase them now. To hell with them! I'm going to see how the other guys are."

He shook off George's restraining hand and climbed out of the pit. He walked over to the craters where the others had gone to earth. One crater was there no longer. It had become a filled in double grave.

The mate and the one other crew member were lying full-length at the bottom of their crater, face-downwards. Shrapnel lay around like street rubbish, but none of it appeared to have touched them.

"Come on," said the skipper. "Time for chow."

He stood on the crater rim care-

less of the array of mechanism. He was beyond caring. Fate was using him for a football, and one could only shrug and sneer.

Slowly, the mate raised his grimy face. The shells had come rather nearer this refuge, and the tide of thick, sooty gas had washed over it many times. There were tear furrows down his cheeks. He might have been crying. It might have been the gas making his eyes stream.

"Milman's dead, sir."

The skipper frowned. "Sure? He doesn't look it."

"No, it was just one small splinter. In his right eye."

Captain Freiburg sighed. "Barker and Heinz are dead, too. And buried. That leaves only four of us. Just right for bridge. Got a deck of cards on you?"

The mate sat up. "No, sir." He was puzzled by the skipper's tone.

George came up in time to hear the last bit, and wasn't puzzled. He understood the skipper's tone. He knew he'd have to take charge for a while. Freiburg had thrown in his hand.

He examined Milman. Dead, all right. He clambered out and took a careful survey of the whole battlefield through his telescope. It was as before. Not a movement. And it still looked like rain.

The skipper was sitting on the edge of the crater, swinging his legs and filling his pipe.

George said: "You'll be all right there for a bit, Skip? I'm going over to try to contact H.Q. and find what side it's on."

The skipper nodded absently, busy with his pipe.

The mate said: "Can I come?"

"Sure, pal."

They started walking towards the big, dully gleaming hull. Sparks came hesitantly, at a diagonal, to join them. The blood was drying on his chin.

"Truce?" he asked.

"I just don't know," said George. "Be ready to duck if anything starts up."

Nothing did. They came up to the wheeled monster. They could see no signs of hatches or port-holes, and when they'd walked around it, it was plain that the hull was a completely unbroken surface save for two short, flexible rods, near the nose, backward-flung like antennae.

George reached up, on his toes. He got one of the rods and pulled it. It waggled loosely, and sprang slowly back when he released it. The monster didn't seem offended. It ignored him.

He picked up a rock, banged it several times against the hull. The mate and Sparks stood a little way back lest the wheels started going round. But they didn't.

"No one at home," said George, tossing the rock away. "It's a complete mystery. Wonder if they *are* watching us through that hull in some way—one-way vision?"

In case that were so, he made what he considered to be friendly signs at the hull. It remained unresponsive. He threw up his hands.

"Maybe the tank drivers have something to say. Let's see."

They plodded over the cracked earth to the nearest tank, half expecting it to turn and cover them with its gun. (The guns protruded from the tanks' bodies, not their turrets, which were much too small.) But the whole arc of tanks they were approaching remained static, and docilely permitted themselves to be inspected.

The difference here was that the turret had a lid with a handle. George had to screw up his courage to clamber onto the first tank and try to open it up. But soon all three of them were doing it on the tanks, and finding exactly the same thing. The lid came up with a twist of the handle. Inside was the breech of the self-loading gun, with its automatic ammunition feed; a certain amount of what seemed to be radar apparatus, with a tiny screen; and a man-sized driving seat, with a video screen and an instrument panel before it.

Everything seemed to be there—except the driver.

They came together again to compare notes. The notes were identical. All the tanks were driverless.

"They couldn't have got out—we'd have seen 'em go," said Sparks.

"Perhaps there's another trap in the floor, and they've sunk through it into the ground," said the mate, who wasn't without humor when there wasn't much to be afraid of.

"It's remote control, with what might be provision for manual control," said George. "But where are the controllers? Playing possum in that cigar on wheels? Or way in the distance somewhere?"

"I think they're in the cigar?" said the mate. "Stuck, because the power's failed. That thing came charging towards us bent on murder. Then something—perhaps the discovery that its batteries were running out?—made it turn round to go back. All the tanks turned round, too, at the same time: they must be powered from that thing. But it ran out of gas or something and stopped dead. Perhaps we'd better get back before they refill it or repair it."

George scratched his head. He was looking at the big white O painted on the nearest tank.

"I suppose that's a distinguishing mark," he said, "but they've all got the same letter—or circle."

"Or zero," said Sparks.

"Listen," said the mate. There was a distant heavy drone.

"Coming from the sky," said Sparks. "Airplanes."

"Let's get back," said George, and they started off. The drone grew behind them, ballooning up over their heads menacingly. They looked back and up over their shoulders and saw only the gray mask of the sky.

The skipper was still sitting there, smoking his pipe reflectively. If he'd heard the droning, he didn't seem bothered by it.

"Hello, boys. Learn anything?"

"Yes, and no," said George. The droning worried him. He gazed up. "They're either above or in the clouds," he said. "Probably they don't know we're here. They'll pass over."

With a shrieking crescendo the first sheaf of bombs dropped on an arc of the tank perimeter, and two of the tanks were flung in the air like playthings. The blast sent them all headlong into the crater on top of the dead Milman. The skipper somehow escaped it, and sat there looking slightly surprised. George grabbed his legs and pulled him in.

"My pipe!" said the skipper. sounding injured. He scrabbled for it.

The war began again. All round the distant skirts of the plain unseen A.-A. guns opened up, firing at the equally invisible enemy in the sky. This time the tanks and the wheeled thing took no part in it—except as targets for the bombs.

The people in the crater, although they heard plenty, saw little of the battle. They were piled in a heap and even those at the bottom felt horribly exposed to the objects dropping from the gray, poisonous clouds. Mostly these were bombs, but sometimes they were great chunks of wreckage from flying machines the A.A. guns had hit. Amid unending thunder, the sky rained destruction. and they could only lie there and take it.

Then the droning, somewhat lessened, died away towards the west. The bombing had ceased, and the guns, except in the west, were quietening down.

Then all was quiet again.

George counted heads. By some miracle, they were all still there, including Milman's, which remained the only dead one. There were a few bruises and grazes, and the radio-op.'s unlucky and ill-used lip was bleeding again: it was the only real blood.

The skipper was looking thoughtful, and George hoped it was a good sign.

Sparks said thickly: "What I really need is a gum-shield, but has anyone got a spare handkerchief?"

The mate gave him one silently. He wasn't feeling humorous at the moment.

George stood up. His head ached from the concussions. A little dazedly, he took stock again of this noisy corner of Venus. All twenty-five tanks were there, but several of them had been shifted around a bit by blast, and three lay on their sides and one on its back: positions from which it seemed unlikely they could operate. If the "cigar" had been touched, it didn't show it: possibly its armor was impervious to bomb splinters. It stood squarely and impassively on its wheels in the same spot.

But in the vaporous distance other things were moving. Towards them, it seemed. George turned the telescope on them, and groaned. Another tank attack was developing.

He slumped back into the crater. He was beginning to feel something of the skipper's despair. What was the use? There was no surcease. You couldn't hit back and you couldn't run. You just had to grovel there and take this battering from people you couldn't see, not knowing even what they looked like nor why they should

go to these lengths to kill you without a parley or a warning. His vision of himself exploring Venus shrank to a pitiful picture of himself cowering in a hole until he was killed, by unknowns for an unknown reason. It was senseless and unjust.

He told the others. The Captain shrugged, and said nothing. The mate glowered and said no more. Sparks couldn't have said anything anyway: his lip was too sore. He just rolled his eyes up, to indicate a sort of pathetic, half-humorous acceptance, and lay back.

Suddenly, and in concord, those tanks about them which were still right way up began to move. They jockeyed slowly backwards, forming a smaller, tighter but whole circle. When the circle was complete, they stopped. The wheeled thing didn't move.

George said: "You know, I don't think the power was ever off. I believe they're taking up positions to defend us!"

The others were jerked out of their apathy.

"Turncoats?" said the mate. "I don't get it. They were trying to shoot us to pieces."

The skipper still said nothing, but he was becoming interested in things again. He watched intently.

The tanks in their own circle opened fire first. Presently the watchers saw why. The more distant, advancing tanks were smaller and much swifter, but had correspondingly smaller armament: the bigger tanks were taking advantage of their own greater range. There were fifty or more of the smaller tanks, though, and they whirred around like desert beetles, making themselves into difficult targets. They began dashing in to take quick shots with their own guns, then zig-zagging off again. They didn't always get away with it.

It was exciting to watch, but dangerous. Shells were flying all ways. But the men peeping over the rim of the crater believed that this time they were neutral, and nothing was deliberately aimed at them. Therefore, illogically, they felt safer.

The feeling was short-lived. A small enemy tank dashed in between two of their own (they were beginning to look upon them as their own) knocked-out tanks, breaking into the defensive ring, and came charging on towards them squirting shells as it came. They were small shells, and whizzed harmlessly over the fallen space-ship behind them.

Before the tank could depress its gun elevation, the great ship on wheels suddenly came to life with a roar of rocket vents. With terrific acceleration it bore down on the small tank and shouldered it out of its path as a mad bull charges a hapless, dismounted picador. There was a sound like the clash of giant cymbals. The tank rolled helplessly on its back, like a turtle. Its tracks churned the air uselessly. The wheeled monster pulled up almost in its own length with a great shrieking of brakes. It became quiescent again.

George became aware of the skipper beside him, a fellow witness, and

bawled in his ear: "They're very much alive in the H.Q.!"

The captain nodded, and pointed at the helpless tank. He shouted something back, but the din of battle drowned it except for the word "Triangle!"

George looked at the tank again, and noted the big green triangle painted on it. Sometime, he thought, if he lived, he might be able to fit the pieces of this puzzle together. The white circles fought the strange Terrestrials, then suddenly turned to defend them against the green triangles. Why? What was the fighting about, anyway? And who were the combatants? Did it go on like this all of the time all over Venus, or had they happened to drop into the middle of a local war?

Suddenly, as if obeying a single voice, all the small attacking tanks wheeled round simultaneously and clattered swiftly back in the direction from which they'd come, leaving behind them only dust trails and the dozen or so of their number which had been knocked out.

The firing ceased abruptly.

The skipper said: "We've beaten them off."

"We?" echoed George. "Who are 'we'?"

The skipper shrugged, and peered into the distances after the fleeing tanks. He became suddenly rigid. "Uh-uh. Telescope, George."

George passed it.

"There's no end to it," the Captain said, presently. "Unless this is the end coming. It looks like it."

George was straining his eyes to see what the Captain could see. He could only make out, somewhere near the blurred horizon, it seemed, a dark, moving spot.

"What is it?"

"It's the grandfather of all tanks. About five times the size of our friends here. Lord, it must be all of twenty feet tall and weigh around three hundred tons. Coming this way. Rather slow. Looks grim. Seems to be alone."

"Coming to our rescue? Maybe that's what frightened the triangle corps off."

"I'd like to think so, but I'm afraid not. Our late attackers are dashing towards it like kids running to their mother. It's not firing at them. Gosh, it reminds me of a big, fat, female spider and her brood. They're forming up behind her now—hanging on her apron-strings, as it were. . . It's no use, George. It's carrying their sign: a green triangle. We're in for it this time. Got any aspirin on you?"

He relinquished the telescope to George with a slight smile. George looked at him curiously.

"You're perking up again, Skip. I thought you'd given up."

"I had, George, and I have again—now I've seen what's coming. The first time I felt that everyone and everything was against us. But when the lads in the H.Q. over there started carrying a gun for us, I felt a whole lot better. It's nice to have someone on your side, and you must admit they've put up a good show."

"I see," said George. The Captain

hated being out on his own, bearing the whole responsibility when he was helpless to do anything about it. He was still helpless, but not alone: the unknown commander of the wheeled thing had taken over their defense. He had an ally on his own level. He seemed to have forgotten that two of his crew had been killed by the white circle tanks. Or else he looked upon it as a mistake.

Sparks and the mate still crouched silently at the bottom of the pit. They looked dazed from the shelling. They winced as a boom sounded from the distance, and went flat as the shriek of an approaching shell split the air. It came down with a great rushing sound some three hundred yards behind the hull of the spaceship, and with a tremendous crack a gusher of brown earth shot towards the lowering sky. Black smoke boiled up from its base.

Here we go again, thought George, and felt depressed. He let himself slide slowly back into the crater. The skipper remained up there.

The white circle tanks began firing, their guns cocked at extreme elevation. The skipper observed through the telescope.

"Our shells are falling short," he called down. "We can't reach him. He's stopped well out of range. He's going to shoot us up from there."

Another shell came wailing, then tearing down. Crack! Still plus, but a hundred yards nearer.

The radio-operator looked at George over his handkerchief. His scared eyes said what George was thinking: only a matter of time now, and not much of it.

Then they jumped as the rockets of the cigar on wheels roared suddenly. They felt the vibration of the ship's weight moving off, and they all—even the mate—scrambled up to see whether it was abandoning them, rushing off to a safe place out of range. But, its vents screaming, its wheels racing, it was shooting like an arrow towards the dim bulk of the giant tank.

George felt an odd lump arise in his throat. Our champion, he thought. Mad, useless courage. This tank was far too big and solid to be overthrown, as the midget tank had been, merely by the H.Q.'s weight. The H.Q. could only smash itself to pieces as a boat splinters itself on a rock. Perhaps it only intended to worry the tank, spoil its aim, dart around it like a dog around a bear, using its superior speed to preserve itself.

Using unsuspected small quick-firing guns, the tank opened up on the thing rocketting towards it. The crackling fire had no visible effect. The H.Q. drove through the jumping shell-bursts unchecked. Indeed, it increased its velocity, began to veer, then swerved back sharply at terrific speed.

They had a glimpse of its pointed nose catching the tank obliquely in the side, just under the turret. Then they saw no more for several minutes, because they were blinded by the flash of white light which seemed to rive both heaven and earth.

When they picked themselves up

and began to receive visual impressions again, the thunderous echoes of the explosion were still repeating themselves around the horizon. They had to give Sparks immediate first aid. His lower lip was just raw flesh now, like a burst tomato, and they had to gag him. He was moaning with the pain of it.

The giant tank stood out there in the middle distance, brewing up, with both tracks blown off and its turret lying in halves a quarter of a mile away. Its gun was broken off short as though it had been a stick of chalk. A jagged crack ran down its frontal plate. It looked like a black cauldron boiling merrily on a fire.

One wheel of the H.Q. had been blown back in their direction, and lay, somehow pitifully, on the ground near the great steel wheel. It was the sole remaining fragment. The rest seemed to have been atomized.

A great many of the small tanks sheltering behind the big one were laying around in pieces. If any at all had survived, they had fled.

The guarding, white circle tanks had relapsed into silence and disinterestedness.

The skipper surveyed the battlefield. He was very moved. He said to George: "What great guys they were! They must have known they were riding a cargo of dynamite. Fuel tanks burst, I guess."

George said: "Now I don't suppose we'll ever know who they were. Or even if there were any."

"Uh?"

"Well, we still don't know, do we?"

"I'll stake my life there were people in there who knew just what they were doing," said the Captain, stubbornly.

George didn't argue. For one thing, he'd no facts to go on. For another, it was obvious that the skipper had an emotional need to believe that there were Venusians on his side, faithful unto death, that the whole planet wasn't hostile. That belief had lifted him out of his despair, given him his faith back. What did it matter if the belief were right or wrong, so long as it sustained him? He might very well be right, anyhow.

They inspected their space-ship inside and out. Things had been pretty badly shaken up, but the only thing beyond ultimate repair was the radio set. The fins were grotesquely crumpled, but could be straightened out on the portable work-benches, given time. After that, the great problem would be to get the ship back standing vertically on its tail, the take-off position.

"If only we had winches," said the skipper.

The mate was feeling brighter now, and had an idea.

"Can't we do something with the tanks—use 'em, I mean?"

The Captain said: "I doubt it. I suspect they were directed and powered from the mobile H.Q., and now that's gone. . . Besides, we'd need cables."

"The old Terrestrial tanks carried cables for pulling each other out of awkward spots," said George. "Let's

have a look at these things."

They found each tank had a cable locker at the rear, containing fifty yards or so of oiled steel, cable an inch and a half thick.

They looked at each other. "It's like an answer to a prayer," said the skipper. "We can join the cables together. Then, if we can get only eight or nine of these tanks working somehow. . ."

George said: "You know, I've been wondering about the driving seats. It seems to argue that the things weren't always remote controlled, and perhaps still needn't be. I think there's alternative provision for manual control. That panel in front of the seat—it has manual switches on it. I'm going to try it. Keep clear of the tracks."

He climbed into the tank they were standing beside.

None of the switches or levers was marked, and he began a game of trial and error with them. He caught himself by surprise and hit the forward movement lever at the first attempt. The tank jolted forward. It went quite a hundred yards before he found out how to stop it. But the controls were easy to manage once he'd mentally labeled everything. The video screen showed him where he was going. Twenty minutes later he was giving the skipper driving lessons.

When the skipper had mastered it, he brought the tank to a halt and said to George: "We've two week's work to do on the fins before they're strong enough to support the ship. That's if the triangle crowd don't attack again and do more damage. But if we're left in peace, then there's the danger that these tanks might take it into their heads to wander off before we can use 'em, and leave us stranded. Wonder if we can switch off the remote controls in any way?"

They experimented, removing an antenna. But then the tank wouldn't move.

George said: "If you cut off the remote control, you also cut the tank off from its source of power. We'll have to take the risk that they'll stay here."

"I don't like taking risks," said the skipper. "Look, George, I'd like you to have a scout around in the helicopter. I know you want to explore, anyhow, but the main thing is to try to contact the white circle G.H.Q., whoever and wherever they are. Tell 'em we'd like their continued aid in defense, also their tanks for haulage. Maybe they can send mobile workshops to help with the repairing. They do seem to be on our side now. Tell 'em we only came to establish friendly contact, anyhow, not to make enemies. Tell 'em how their H.Q. blew itself up in our defense. Thank them on our behalf. We don't understand why they're protecting us, but we're grateful, and all that. Will you do that?"

"Sure. I didn't aim to leave Venus without meeting the Venusians or having a look at the place. I'll leave right away."

It was easy to get the helicopter out. It had been packed carefully in

pieces, and had suffered no damage. In the normal way it would have had to have been lowered piece by piece from the hatch at the top of the ship. But now that hatch was almost at ground level, and it was like unloading a railroad box-car. The four of them assembled the helicopter, and adjusted the variable pitch vanes to cope with the heavier atmosphere. George nearly crashed on the first trial flight, but eventually they got the pitch right and the thing flew smoothly. George made a wide circuit of the area but saw no sign of enemy tanks.

They packed concentrated food, and tested the Teleo components. The Teleo was undoubtedly the foremost invention of the age, and had been produced for the Martian expedition. The disappointment of that had left its use limited. In war it would have been invaluable, keeping infantry patrols in silent communication. Half a century ago it could have been an interpreter. But now there was One World and one tongue.

Again, it suited only certain physical types. It produced excruciating headaches in others, among whom Captain Freiburg was one. It could have been useful in the management of the ship at times when speech was impossible, but Freiburg preferred to keep a clear head. Also, its range was limited to about three yards.

It looked simple enough: just a skull cap of thin, flexible and sensitized material, connected by a twin cable to a small box worn on a belt. The only control was a push-pull switch. Two or more people using Teleo could communicate telepathically, even though they spoke different languages. A thought, at base, was a measurable electric discharge from the brain cells. The Teleo merely measured that discharge and transmitted it on a short wave. Or it could receive such an impulse: it was a two-way radio. The discharge was reproduced in the receiver's brain, became a thought which was interpreted in the recipient's language.

There was a mask screening unconscious or subconscious thoughts. Only deliberately formed conscious thoughts came through, and then only by the will of the sender, who could switch the apparatus on or off.

George had half a dozen sets packed in a satchel. As he said before they'd started: "If I meet any Venusians, I only hope they've heads to put these on."

When the helicopter was loaded, he shook hands all round. The skipper warned: "Don't go anywhere near the ceiling. Remember, the clouds are poisonous. Look for that white circle. Good luck, George."

Then he was humming about over their heads, gaining height, till the three faces below looked like white dots, then became undistinguishable, while the space-ship shrank to a mere stick lying on the ground. Then the stick floated away behind and was swallowed by the misty distance. Ahead, the blur on the horizon began to resolve itself into mountains, white-peaked.

He flew on, and presently was pass-

ing between the silent, snow-powdered peaks and staring down into desolate, twisting valleys. And then, beyond, the plain resumed again, and went on and on. Visibility under that dull sky was very poor. In no direction was the horizon clear.

Over the plain he had to keep fairly close to the ground lest he should miss seeing any friendly vehicles. He once glimpsed a huge metal wheel, of the kind which had encircled them, bowling swiftly along on a secret errand and cutting its path as straight as a bee-line. It was quite by itself on the vast plain but seemed confident of its mission. It was going roughly in his present direction and he swooped down and tried to follow it. But from directly above its thinness made it all but invisible, and he lost it. Then he saw it a minute later spinning away on a divergent course, like a silver dollar, too far and fast for him to have a hope of catching it again.

That was the only moving thing he saw until a jet plane dropped out of the clouds and came screaming down at him. It shot past and banked widely, and in those moments he saw it clearly: a short, stubby thing, gray as the clouds, with swept-back wings. On each wing was painted a white circle.

His heart leaped. A friendly plane. Perhaps it would guide him to the G.H.Q. Perhaps it had come for that purpose.

He hadn't time to speculate more about that, for the plane zoomed through a great semi-circle and came straight for him spitting cannon shells. There were a few seconds of noisy confusion. He lost control of the helicopter. It was taken from him and bounced about the sky like a rubber ball. And sometimes the green-brown plain became the sky and sometimes it became a great wall, standing up first on this side of him and then on that. There were smoke blotches drifting past and fragments flying and ear-splitting bangs.

Whether he pressed the ejector switch voluntarily or not, he never knew. But suddenly he was flying through the air without the now unreliable aid of the helicopter. Then he was falling. His parachute opened automatically. Under its see-sawing canopy, he tried to regain control of his own rocking senses.

The helicopter, with its tail shot off, was side-slipping away and below him. Its brusque executioner had quite disappeared, presumably back into the clouds.

He watched the helicopter spin down and crash on the plain, and was angry and bewildered. Would he ever even begin to make sense of it?

He'd thought, like the skipper, that the white circle was now the symbol of an ally. Yet a white circle plane had just shot him down on sight.

A mistake? But surely they had radio, and the information had gone out to all local areas by now? If not, then White Circle G.H.Q. wasn't so hot, and its help could only be regarded as a doubtful quantity. Perhaps they'd changed sides again? Such vacillating characters could

never be trusted.

He landed with a foot-tingling jar. It was just such a place as that where the space-ship had landed: the dirty green-brown plain spreading away into murkiness, and the shell or bomb craters pitting its drab surface. For all his long flight, he'd got nowhere much—only into a worse position. Here he was, many leagues from his fellows, alone and unarmed (his rifle was in the 'copter), with only his legs for transport. And, seemingly, he was between two fires: everyone's foe. Or prey.

He threw off the parachute harness, and began walking in the direction where he'd seen the helicopter crash. It was necessary to salvage the food, and perhaps the gun, but he was beginning to think there was little need to collect the Teleo outfits. Venusians, with or without heads, seemed to be people to avoid.

MARA returned with a bundle of the succulent loogo stalks even before Dox had missed them from his well-guarded store. Swift as she'd been, it was already too late. Mother sat up in bed with her mouth open as if eager to be fed at once. But she'd never eat again. Her mouth was open this time merely because her jaw had dropped.

Mara looked at the fat, still body, shrugged, and thought: Well, that servitude is ended. She fed well. None can say I failed in my duty.

Absently, she began nibbling one of the stalks herself. She felt no sorrow, only relief. She was free from the onus of feeding that insatiable appetite.

Now she wished to be free from Fami itself. It was a problem. The only known way to leave Fami was the way her mother (most reluctantly, she was sure) had gone—along Death's road.

Perhaps Leep knew another way. Still nibbling, she went along to his cave. He was squatting outside writing slowly and painfully upon a strip of bleached cloth. His thin figure was bent absorbedly over it.

"Go away," he said, without looking up. "Even my disciples are not allowed near me when I'm composing."

She sat down silently, watching him, and eating.

"Give me a loogo stalk, and you may stay."

She would have stayed, anyway, but she gave him a stalk.

"Your mother's dead," he said, with his mouth full.

She nodded, not questioning his source of knowledge. Leep was often aware of events without being told of them. He was a mystic, a seer, a versifier, and very lazy. He neither worked nor applied himself to the more honorable busines of stealing. Because of his rare qualities, he had a circle of devotees who stole for him.

"You may have this," he said, passing her the cloth strip.

She took it and read it, as slowly and painfully as he'd written it.

"It's all a pointless game

Played by a forgotten name,
The warlord and child,
Immortal, bored Senilde,
In a house of tricks,
A box of bricks,
Beneath the verdant tower.
Who commands the power
To stifle his breath,
And bring him death?"

"Become my artist now, and I shall write you many such verses," he said.

She tucked the strip carefully in her one pocket. It was worth preserving. Cloth was scarce. This was good cloth. She could use it for patching.

She shook her head. "I wish to leave Fami. Which is the way?"

"There's only one way: to follow your mother."

She nodded silently.

"All ways lead to death," he said, sententiously. "Even the way of acceptance, of remaining here. All shall die soon, for shortly the glacier shall flow over Fami."

Again she nodded, and left him. As she walked back through the village, she looked around. This wide, fertile ledge, with its caves, shacks, and vegetable patches, this odd fault on the margin of the great glacier, was the only world she or its inhabitants had ever known. According to the legends, their distant ancestors had fled up here in the mountains for refuge from the harsh, unending war sweeping the greater world.

But the war followed them. Machines flying in the clouds dropped fire and thunder on them, blowing great masses away from the mountain side. When the survivors dared to look, they found the path had been part of those rock-falls, and now all that was left on that side was an abrupt precipice. On the other side, a steep glacier swept down into gloom, putting out an arm to overhang the village. It was so steep and glassily hard that it was plain that if you went down it, you'd never be able to climb back again, even supposing you survived the descent. Above the ledge, away to the side of the glacial arm, the snowy slopes went as steeply up, up to the perpetual clouds. You could, with difficulty, gain the snow slopes, and climb them all the way to the clouds. But your reward would be certain death: for to breathe up in the clouds was fatal.

So when the survivors found good earth on the ledge, they decided to stay there and make the best of things. They built shacks from the material residue of their caravan, hollowed caves, tilled and sowed the earth, and called the place Fami, which merely meant "Home." Most of the men were deserters from the Army, and they brought the Army code with them. They'd lived so long by looting that they'd come to accept it as the primary method of acquiring food and property, indeed, the only honorable one. To do it properly, especially among fellow soldiers, required all one's wits and ingenuity. If you were too stupid or weak or fearful to make a good thief, you had to labor to grow the food and

make the utensils for living. To have to fall back on producing was a confession of failure, and carried a social stigma.

Mara was lucky, in one way. Her father had been in charge of Army provisions, knew all the tricks, and taught her well. She had, in fact, surpassed him, never fumbled it once.

But he did get caught once, in the blackness of night at Filo's granary. The law was that if you caught a thief in the act of stealing you had every right to kill him. It was justice: bungling must be punished. It was the only way to keep the standard of performance high, worthy of the name of art—for a thief claimed the title of "artist."

So he was executed. His last words to Mara were: "Now my burden of duty falls on you. See that your mother never goes hungry—I charge you."

But mother was scarcely anything else but hungry. It was her natural state. Mara earned and gave her thrice as much food as anyone else received, but she always wanted more. Mara began to suspect that her father had allowed himself to be caught on purpose.

So when in the evening the neighbors ceremoniously placed the naked (cloth was short in Fami) body of her mother on the edge of the glacier, and equally ceremoniously gave it a push, she was not sad when she saw it slide away and down, and become a fast-moving speck that the mist swallowed.

She went home and worked on the big, cloth-stuffed mattress she was fashioning from her spoils. (She was one of the reasons for cloth being scarce.) She finished it late in the night, and dragged it through the sleeping village to the glacier. She balanced it on the edge, lay on it, and pushed hard. She worked the ponderous thing away from the edge —then suddenly she was riding it at gathering speed down through the complete darkness.

Leep had advised her that the only way out was to follow her mother and she was doing it—literally. She was a simple girl, and something of a fatalist. What no other inhabitant of Fami had dared do even in daylight, she was doing casually at night, for no other reason than that was when her carrier was completed. She lay spread-eagled on the thing at an acute angle with the air rushing over her like an upward gale, with no idea of what lay even a yard ahead of her. The swift glissading went on for a long time. She'd adjusted herself to it and was even beginning to doze, when the mattress started to slow with a series of jerks.

It stopped. She knelt on the mattress, groping around it with an exploratory hand. Her fingers dabbled in water in most directions. It was very cold. She got out her knife, split the mattress up the middle, and snuggled into the interior. Soon she was warm and asleep. The main object was accomplished: she had escaped from Fami. She could wait till first light to discover where she'd escaped to.

She awakened sometime after dawn and found her bed poised on a narrowing spit of hard snow. Several longer tongues of the glacier reached out into the shallows of the wide lake formed by its melting.

She found four shrunken but fairly well preserved bodies lying along the margin of the lake and recognized them as inhabitants of Fami who'd died in the last few years. Her mother was not among them, and she surmised that the greater weight of that body had carried it on into the lake. The bones of many of her ancestors and old acquaintances must lie around here, beneath the ice-snow or the water. Behind her, the great ice slope mounted ever more steeply into the mist.

Beyond the smooth, leaden level of the lake were hills. She skirted the lake to reach them, passed through valleys which wound ever downwards until she emerged, towards evening, on a wide plain where the air was warm, almost oppressive. She slept there in a hollow. Next morning she ate the last of her loogo stalks, and set out across the plain.

She heard spasmodic rumblings and bangings in the far distance, and once the heavy drone of unseen aircraft passed over her head. But these were sounds one often heard from Fami. They'd never hurt anyone during her lifetime, and so she was not afraid of them.

She was not even afraid when she saw two strange birds fight briefly high in the sky and one fall dead to the ground. But she was curious when she saw a man floating down from the heavens swinging beneath what looked like a big white sheet. The man might have some food with him —and that sheet looked like a nice piece of cloth. So she started walking to the spot where he'd come to earth.

Presently, she came upon the abandoned parachute, and was rapturous about the thin, smooth, incredibly clean silk. She gathered it together, tied it in a bundle with its own cords. She could see the man in the distance walking towards the broken body of the fallen bird. She balanced the bundle on her head and walked after him.

GEORGE delved in the wreckage of the helicopter. Everything seemed to be there except the automatic rifle, his sole weapon. It must have fallen out high up, and might now be anywhere within a radius of a couple of miles, and probably no longer in one piece.

He bit a chunk off a food bar, and laid the rest of it on the fuselage while he groped in the last corner of the splintered body to make sure of what he was already quite sure of: the rifle was gone. When he reached for the rest of the bar, that was gone too.

He looked on the ground, where it might have dropped, but it wasn't there. But a few yards away was his parachute, bundled up like a cushion. Sitting on it, watching him and eating the last of the bar, was a young girl with a solemn but beautiful pale face. She was wearing only

a very tattered frock. Her limbs were bare, her hair jet black, her eyes brown and expressionless.

"Well, hello," he said, intensely surprised and equally interested.

She continued to sit and chew and watch him.

"Hungry?" he asked, and tossed her another food bar. She caught it neatly and eyed the box he'd taken it from.

In his turn, he inspected the first live Venusian any Earthling had seen. If they're all like this, he thought, it's going to be all right. She not only had a head, but a nice head; and all her other members were not only in the right places, but most pleasingly arranged there.

He got out a couple of the Teleo outfits, and went into an elaborate miming routine to indicate what they were for and to assure her that the apparatus wouldn't harm her. He might as well have conserved his energy. She sat there finishing the second bar calmly, her gaze wandering from him back to the box. Indifferent, she let him adjust the cap over her raven hair.

With practise, this thought projection came as automatically as speech, and might therefore be described as speech.

"What's your name?" asked George.

"Mara," she said, without surprise.

"Where are you from, Mara?"

She waved sticky fingers in the general direction of the misty mountains, and then stuck the same fingers in her mouth and sucked them.

"I see. I'm George. I come from another planet, Earth."

Her response was negative. She became interested in the texture of the parachute.

"You may have that," George said, kindly.

"Naturally. It's mine."

"Finders keepers, eh? Look, Mara, what's this war all about? What side are you on—white circles or green triangles?"

She looked at him, as expressionless as ever, and not a thought came across. When she either didn't understand what he meant, or was disinterested, her mind seemed to go a complete blank.

"You don't understand? Circles. Triangles. Get it?"

She obviously didn't, so he hunted in the wreckage for something sharp enough to carve specimen circles and triangles in the turf. When he turned back, holding a pick, she was deep in the provision box helping herself to handfuls of the food bars.

"Hi, what's the game?" he said.

She stopped. "Game?" She pulled a piece of cloth from her pocket and tossed it to him. The unsightly marks on it conveyed nothing except that it was probably something in another language. He gave it back, telling her to read it.

She read the whole verse beginning: *"It's all a pointless game. . ."*

At the end, he switched off his transmitter for a while, did some private thinking, switched on again, took all the bars from her, and said: "Mara these are strictly rationed. But I'll

give you another if you'll tell me where you got this doggerel from, and what it's supposed to mean, and a little more general information about yourself and your people."

She said she didn't know what the verse meant any more than he did, but Leep was a man of strange perception and . . . She told him about Leep, and her mother, and Fami and its history, and the glacier and her escape. He gave her the promised bar and said: "It's a pity my helicopter's completely smashed. We could have flown up to Fami and interviewed your friend, Leep. He seems to know what it's all about."

"Oh, yes. He has made many cloth books of verses of this kind. They foretold many things which have come to pass."

"The village Nostradamus, eh? A useful guy to have around." He pondered, then said abruptly: "Well, it's the only lead. We'll call on him, using our flat feet."

"But the glacier is too slippery to climb."

He tapped the pick. "We'll cut steps. Come on. My time is limited."

He couldn't persuade her to leave the parachute. It was too precious a find. So he carried the provision box, the pick, spare Teleos, and his slung telescope, and was rather glad he'd not found the rifle after all. She walked sedately behind carrying the bundled 'chute on her head. They kept their Teleos on all the time.

THE glacier was on altogether a greater scale than he'd imagined: wider, higher, steeper. This was the fifth day of painful step-cutting, inching up a slope that ran for miles. Every night they had to hack out a niche in which to sleep, enfolded in the silken layers of the parachute. Even then he, in his thick air-suit, could scarce sleep for the cold.

He marveled at the hardihood of Mara. Clad only in her thin frock, placing her bare feet unhesitantly in the ice holes he'd chipped out, she climbed behind him without complaint or obvious fatigue. Nor did she question why she should retrace so tediously the route of her escape from Fami. There were no infantile regrets or crying for the moon in her make-up. She dealt only with facts. Her simple line of reasoning, George suspected, was: This man has food. He is a fool, and gives it away. Therefore, if I accompany him, I shall have food.

That night, as they lay in their small, artificial cave, he accused her directly: "Mara, you're not interested in the war, are you? You don't care if we find the white circle G.H.Q. or not?"

"No."

"And you don't want to return to Fami?"

"No."

"You only come with me because I feed you, and there is no food on the plane?"

"It is nice to be fed. I always had to feed others."

He sighed, and felt oddly regretful. He wished she had kept him company because she liked it. He'd

grown to like having her around in this cold, dreary desolation. Somehow, she was better company even than the Skipper, for she was uncomplicated, unfearful of the future, self-controlled. And, underneath, deep down, he'd found a queer little streak of quiet humor. Not the surface, facetious humor, the cover up for uncertainty, but the real thing, seeing things for what they were, and smiling at them, unafraid.

Suddenly, she said: "Of course, if I wished, I could take the food whenever I wanted."

"No, Mara, not now. The box is locked and the key's in my pocket."

She made no answer, but presently shifted about as though she'd difficulty in getting into a comfortable position for sleep. He lay there dozing lightly and wondering formlessly about the trio back at the space-ship. Had they suffered any more attacks or was the work on the fins going well? He'd been away almost a week now, and almost anything might have happened back there.

Again, how was he going to get back? If he contacted the white circle Venusians soon, they may provide some form of transport. If not, if he never found them, it was not going to be easy.

The automatic direction-recorder in the helicopter had been smashed to fragments in the crash. Therefore, he'd little notion of where the space-ship lay from here. All he knew was that somewhere out on the great plain there were mountain ranges other than this one, and the ship was somewhere way the other side of them. Even if he reached the general area, the ship, in its horizontal position, would not be easy to spot even through the telescope in the poor visibility—he might go wandering miles past it and become hopelessly lost.

And, at this rate, it might be several weeks before he could get back. By then, they may have given him up as lost or dead, and gone home, licking their wounds.

He started out of his sleepy reverie when a few loose objects fell within an inch or two of his nose. He investigated them gingerly. Half a dozen food bars.

He sat up, staring into the freezing darkness. Reaching out, he touched Mara's quiescent form. With the other hand he fumbled in his pocket: the key was still there.

"Yes?" she said, without moving.

"Did I leave the box unlocked?"

"No. I don't need keys. I have my own methods."

"Oh." He lay back. There was something wrong with his idea of Mara's reasoning. She could have helped herself to the food at any time, of course, and left him in the night. It would have been the most natural thing in the world for her, thieving being her profession. They'd argued about the ethics of hard labor as opposed to honest thieving. He'd explained the social code of Earth, but she'd not been impressed by it. So they'd agreed to differ about that.

"Mara," he said, suddenly. "You could have stolen all the food and left me. Why didn't you?"

"Then I should have to carry it, and that box is heavy."

He was disappointed. "So that's all. It's not because you like me?"

"I like you."

"Why?"

"Because you don't want me to steal for you. Everyone I knew, except my father, thought the only point of my existence was to be their artist. You make no such demands on me. I like you."

"Um." It still wasn't quite satisfactory. He said: "I like you too, Mara. Goodnight." And turned over to go to sleep. But he couldn't sleep for a long while. He kept thinking about how he liked Mara.

IN the morning they reached a point on a curve of the glacier from which they could see Fami. Or could have seen it had it been there to see. George, through his telescope, searched the area pointed out by Mara, and saw not a trace of the ledge. The outflanking arm of the glacier had swept over it and now hung, like a huge, torn, white lace curtain. for a thousand feet down the precipice.

"Leep said it would happen soon," said Mara, unperturbed.

"More fool he for staying there," said George, viciously. "Well, he and his rag-books will have to stay there for rather longer now—petrified for posterity. One small pick isn't going to shift *that* weight of ice. Even if we could get him out, he'd scarcely be in a condition for conversation. I guess the war's just got to remain a mystery."

He felt furious at the waste of time and effort, disheartened at the thought of the long, slow climb down the glacier again—to go where? Where was the white circle G.H.Q.?

While he wasted more time, in a clouded fury, glowering and kicking childishly at the side of an ice-step, Mara accepted and handled the situation in her calm, mature way. She'd made a wide, flat cushion of the parachute. Now she seized the heavy provision box and shoved it off down the glacier. George grabbed at it, and missed. The thing went sliding with gathering momentum down the awful slope, then vanished with the speed of a bullet. He switched his anger to her.

"What the hell d'you think you're doing?"

She sat deliberately on the silken cushion, clinging to the step with one hand and patting the space beside her with the other, motioning him to join her. Then she smiled faintly and pointed after the box.

He got it, together with a tremor of apprehension. It hadn't crossed her mind to waste time in climbing down. She'd go the way she went before and she expected him to ride with her. His instinct was to dissuade her for both their sakes: the memory of the length of that run and its hazards was too fresh. But that fear was killed by the greater fear of her surprise and contempt. Carefully, he crawled to her side.

"Sure, let's go. I always had a yen to shoot Niagara."

They slid together, flat on their backs on the cushion, for a hundred yards, and then it felt as though they were no longer sliding, but falling. He glimpsed high ramparts on either side sawing rapidly, actively, at the gray clouds, while his stomach climbed up into his chest and the airflow chilled his cheeks. The swift, uncontrolled motion combined with the utter silence was terrifying. He clung equally fiercely to the material and to Mara, and shut both his eyes and his imagination, waiting for it to end.

After half a lifetime, it ended—abruptly. A wall of freezing cold water came tumbling down over his feet and buried him. He choked and spluttered and thrashed about completely without any sense of direction. and the water seemed to be poking icicles into his eyes, ears, and nose. Then, somehow, he found himself standing breast-deep in the lake, gasping like a landed fish.

Mara, neck-deep, was a few yards off, pushing her wet hair back. Her solemn face split suddenly in a grin when she saw him. He tried to speak and could do nothing but continue to gasp—the water was paralyzingly cold. He beckoned her to follow, and floundered blindly to the shore. When he looked back, she was still out there, walking slowly around, seeming to feel about with her feet.

Then suddenly she did a little duck-dive and disappeared.

He waited over half a minute and she didn't reappear. Half-frightened, half-angry, he started sloshing out towards the spot. Then she bobbed up, yards nearer the shore, bending, and dragging something out of the shallows. It was the food-box. He went to help her.

"You c-cold-blooded little f-fish." His teeth were chattering.

She didn't understand. The Teleos had been washed off both of them. Luckily, the spares were in a waterproof satchel. But before she dried off, she wanted to go back and recover the parachute.

He stuck a Teleo on her and bawled: "Leave it there!" The friction will have worn it full of holes, and anyway it's saturated—it'll weigh a ton now. I'll give you a new one when we reach the ship."

That made her so happy that her face became radiant. The wet frock clung to the curves of her form. A sudden hunger went through him. He caught hold of her, pressed her to him, kissed her roughly, almost brutally. She responded fiercely. Between kisses he babbled foolish promises. "You shall have the best Paris can offer . . . Dresses of silk and coats of fur. . .Jewels and such things as you have never dreamed of. . ."

She giggled like a child and caressed him like a woman.

The remains of her ancestors lay all around them, long past love, or memory, or the promises of life.

IN the afternoon, they struck off in a new direction. Instead of returning down the valleys to the known emptiness of the plain, they toiled over the hills to the west, seeking a

viewpoint. They found it on one crest, and for a moment they stood hand in hand surveying the panorama. Then George's grip tightened. He pointed. Away down where rocks and cliffs abounded there was an isolated pinnacle. Unlike the others, vegetation of some kind clung to its almost perpendicular sides.

Under its height an apparently artificially levelled area lay, with the traces of a pattern showing through the heavy undergrowth. And there also was a long box of a house, dun brown, flat-roofed, many-windowed, with a beetling portico of disproportionate size.

"Beneath the verdant tower. . . The house of bricks, a box of tricks," said George, slowly, his memory only slightly faulty. He thought: Stumbling on it like this. . .This isn't real. It's out of *The Wizard of Oz*.

Then aloud: "Come on, Mara, let's follow the yellow brick road."

Naturally, the allusion meant nothing to her, but she didn't query it, only plunged gaily with him down the hill.

"THIS," said George, when they got to it, "was once a cultivated garden."

She said "Yes," and let her gaze rove over the mold-encrusted stone seats, the weed-grown paths, the stagnant ornamental ponds, and the wilderness that was choking them all. At the far end the house stood as silent as the towering rock-pinnacle behind it. She saw now that the greenness of the latter was some sort of wide-leafed creeper swarming over it and doing its best to hide it, as though resentful of its eminence. But the house and its ridiculous portico was bare and free, as though it possessed a magic talisman against all green parasites.

George noticed that Mara was getting two steps ahead of him up the main drive to the house, and it wasn't because she'd quickened her pace. Ashamed of his hanging back, his caution at what enmity the house might contain, he hastened to catch up with her. They were nearing a big wrought-metal fountain. It was covered with verdigris, and the surrounding basin, into which it had once played, was now an empty bowl, bone-dry.

He was amazed at the similarity of Terrestrial and Venusian ideas of landscape gardening. He thought: This could be Versailles after centuries of total neglect.

Then suddenly the fountain spurted a great wavering umbrella of dirty water well beyond the circumference of the basin, and soaked them through from head to foot before they could skip out of range.

George thought he heard a thin, high laugh from the direction of the house. He glowered as he wiped his face. He hated being made a fool of. Mara just giggled.

"There's a practical joker here somewhere," he growled. "When I've finished with him, he won't be so practical."

The water was sour and evil-smelling, which made it even less funny

for him. His feet squelched in his shoes. There was a solid stone seat nearby. He sat down with the idea of taking his shoes off. The seat sank silently and smoothly into the earth and he was flat on his back with his feet in the air. This time he didn't know whether the distant laugh sounded or not, because Mara howled so loudly.

Red with mortification, violently angry, he jumped up, threw a withering glance at the convulsed Mara, and went striding purposefully towards the house. He'd find this joker and wring his neck.

The moss-grown drive was hard under his feet. And then, although its surface texture still looked exactly the same, it stopped being hard. It became soft, sticky, gooey, like molten rubber. He sank ankle-deep.

Grimly, he tried to plod through to the other indetectable side of this patch. But the stuff gripped and clung, and soon he was walking in slow motion, lifting one grotesquely enlarged blob of a foot after the other, with ridiculous care to keep his balance. Soon he realized the accumulation was getting so heavy that presently he'd not be capable of moving at all. So he abandoned the frontal assault, and floundered to the solid earth at one side of the drive.

His dignity had been sorely hurt, and at first he wouldn't look at Mara when she came up to him, wisely keeping to the verge. He tried to pull the stuff off his feet with his fingers and it stretched and stuck like chewed gum. He got into a terrible mess. The watcher at the house, invisible from here, was cackling continually. When Mara recovered from her own hilarity, she produced her knife and cut and scraped most of the mess off.

During this operation, her companion in mirth presented himself. He came from under the jutting portico, a short, broad figure in a monkish gown tied at his thick waist by a cord. He was red-cheeked, healthy-looking, seemed to be about fifty. His mouth was sensual and hung half open, giving him a vacant look that was enhanced by his queer, pale eyes, which seemed to comprehend only part of what they saw.

He looked harmless. He said something in a weak, cracked sort of voice to George, who merely scowled at him. Mara answered him in his own language. They had quite a chat.

"Don't mind me," said George, getting the last of the stuff off.

Mara said: "It's Senilde."

"Oh," said George, and reflected. As he wanted information from Senilde, perhaps it wouldn't be politic to begin by chewing the guy's head off. With an effort he swallowed his gorge.

"Explain about the Teleo," he instructed Mara, while getting another outfit from the satchel.

"I have explained," she said, holding out her hand for it. She was still two steps ahead of him. He handed it over, fighting to stop another scowl from forming.

Through the new medium, Senilde said: "Once, long ago, I invented a

gadget like this."

"Indeed?" said George. "What did you do with it?"

Senilde made a careless gesture. "Threw it away. I throw all my toys away in time. One gets bored . . . Still, I'm glad you came and let me play with my garden again. I haven't been able to find a victim for years. There's very few people left on this planet, you know. Perhaps I overdid it."

"Overdid what?"

"The war. It's a game I used to play."

"Used to? It still seems to be in full swing."

"Oh, yes, it'll run on for a century or two, I suppose, until the last of the things have smashed themselves up. I got tired of them, and just let 'em run on. They're purely automatic, you know."

George said: "You mean, all those tanks and planes and things are entirely unmanned?"

"That's it."

George remembered the skipper basing his faith on his "white circle" allies. He remembered his own emotion when the wheeled H.Q. seemed to come to their rescue. He was annoyed to discover they'd both been fooling themselves. In some way it seemed unfair, an ironical let-down. He said, truculently: "Well, what the hell do you mean by letting them go on smashing up the planet?"

Senilde shrugged. "I don't mean anything. None of it means anything."

"It does to me. You nearly killed me and my friends—in fact, for all I know, my friends may have been killed by now. Can't you stop it?"

"Yes, if I want to."

"Then please stop it at once."

Senilde said, petulantly: "Why *should* I stop my game just because of you?"

George snatched Mara's knife. "Because I'll stick this through your gizzard if you don't."

"My dear fellow, I've often amused myself by sticking knives through my gizzard. I once stuck three through my heart. It doesn't have any effect—doesn't even tickle. I heal instantly. You can't kill me—I'm immortal, unfortunately."

"We'll see about that," said George, starting towards him with knife upraised.

Mara grabbed his arm, held him. "No, George. I don't believe in violence. We can always get what we want without trouble—I always have. Brutality is a poor substitute for wits."

Senilde looked at her with mild approval. "You're sensible as well as beautiful, girl. George (what a queer name!)—let me have your girl, and I'll switch off the war."

George let him have a hay-maker instead. It hit the solar plexus more by luck than judgment. Senilde rebounded a yard or so. His pale eyes lit up, and he smiled slobberingly. "Oh, a new game! What do you call it? What do I do now?"

George groaned.

Mara said: "Perhaps you'll show us over your house. Senilde. Have you

any more tricks like the fountain?"

"Yes, lots of them. Such fun when I used to have visitors. Of course, I can't show you *all* of them. That would spoil it. I want you to discover some for yourselves—that's the best way to do it. You'll be so amused. Come on."

They followed him back to the house, George very carefully, trying to tread in Senilde's footprints lest he tread in some other unsuspected gooey patch. This care didn't stop the doorstep from suddenly swinging down like a trapdoor under his feet, precipitating him down a chute into blackness. There was more sticky stuff at the bottom. He sat there helpless in the dark, stuck like an insect on fly-paper.

He thought: There *must* be a way to kill that idiot!

Then he began to think of the skipper. Was he still alive? Was he waiting, wondering, hoping George would return soon with friendly Venusians, on their own intellectual level, eager to help? Probably. And here was the intrepid explorer falling and fooling about like a slapstick comedian, getting no place in a crazy Lewis Carroll world. Thank heavens the skipper couldn't see him now!

The lights went on. He was in a cellar, bare save for benches around the walls. Presumably they were for an invited audience to sit on and howl at whichever unfortunate guest happened to fall into the trap. Senilde was there, with his foolish grin, and Mara, who, after one startled look, went into peals of laughter.

George said, grimly: "Mara, you disappoint me. I thought you had a real sense of humor. There's nothing remotely funny in this childish clowning. As for you, little fat man, why don't you be your age? How old are you, for heaven's sake?"

"Let me see—is it three or four thousand years? My memory isn't what it was. Venusian years, that is, of course—rather shorter than your own."

George said gruffly: "I don't believe a word of it. Get me out of here."

"Certainly." Senilde pressed a button and a liquid began bubbling out of little holes in the floor. It dissolved and melted away the sticky compound and set George free.

The whole house was like that. Door handles which either came off in your hand or stuck obstinately to it or else gave you electric shocks. Stairways which, as you climbed them, abruptly changed into chutes so that you found yourself at the bottom again. If you picked up a book and opened it, it was liable to send a cloud of sneezing powder into your face.

There was one ingenious passage where the floor began to move under your feet in the opposite direction to which you were going and with equal speed. And it kept that perverse direction and pace whichever way you tried to go and however fast. You could run like mad, yet remain in the same place, never able to attain the end of the passage.

George went through the gamut

with sullen patience, finding it rather more easy to bear when Mara also fell for some of these gags. What had got his goat before was being made the sole butt, being made to look ridiculous before Mara.

At last the tour was over. In all the great house, they'd seen no other soul but themselves. They came now into a lounge furnished with Eastern luxuriousness: everything was deep and soft, the chairs, the carpet, the divans. It was many-colored and cheerful because bright sunlight smote in through the windows and made the silks and satins glow.

"The sun—out at last?" said George, wonderingly, and went to the window. It was as though the window were glazed: he couldn't see the sky very clearly—it was just a flat whiteness with, in the center, a very bright hazy disk, like the sun shining through high mist.

Senilde said, in his thin voice: "It's my own private sun. Quite a small thing, really, but it's perpetual and emits all the qualities of sunlight. You know, as I grow older I find I don't want to do much else but bask in here in the sunlight. Except for today, I've not been out of this room for many years. It's too dark and dull out there under the clouds. I often regret I cut the planet off from the sun like that. I've made it such a depressing place for myself."

"What do you mean, exactly?" asked George.

Mara sank into a divan, and a cushion squeaked under her like a great rat. Senilde giggled fatuously.

George gripped the fat man's shoulders and shook him. "Never mind the kid stuff, Senilde. Just what have you been getting up to on this planet? I want to take a full report back to Earth, and by heaven, I'll get it from you. You think I can't hurt you? I can. I can smash this place to pieces, burn it down. Where would you be then, without your playthings and your sunlight and your soft cushions, you old sybarite?"

One moment he was standing there shaking Senilde like a man emptying a sack. And then he was lying on his back on the carpet just opening his eyes and wondering where he was. Mara was lying a few feet from him, seemingly unconscious. Stiffly, he turned over and crawled to her. As he reached her, she sat up dazedly.

"Are you all right, Mara?"

She nodded. "I thought he'd killed you. So I stabbed him through the heart with my knife. I don't know what happened."

A knife dropped between them on the carpet. They looked up. Senilde stood over them. He'd closed his mouth and didn't look quite so foolish. He said: "There's your toy back, my dear. I told you that sort of thing was useless. So many people have tried it at one time or another that it became tiresome. I discouraged them with a little thing I wear which creates an electrical field at a touch and stuns anyone who's much too near. Another good trick, eh?"

But they didn't laugh and this time

nor did he.

He said: "Don't ever threaten me again, George (silly name!). Don't try to use violence on me or my possessions. It'll never work and you may kill yourself. Everything I have is protected. I'm a cautious man. Now make yourselves comfortable, and I'll tell you my history. You'd never have got away from here without having to listen to it, anyway. Every man needs an audience, and I've been without one for far too long. . ."

"NATURE makes many blunders," Senilde said, "and one of them—I thought—is that a man should die. The infusoria never die. Simple cell creatures keep splitting in halves, and the halves in turn split, and so on. But all the original portions still live. Any one of those creatures could truly be said to be immortal. You can take the tissue of any organ of man or beast and keep it alive in a suitable culture for ever. Yet had it been left in the man's body, it would have died when the man died.

"Single protoplasmic cells or small groups of them survive. But if they grow in a large, multi-celled body, like that of a man, that large group dies. What kills it? The nature of the cells hasn't changed—they're the same substance. The only different factor is—the size of the group. Once a group passes beyond a certain size, it seals its own doom."

"Critical mass," murmured George.

"You know about atomic energy?" said Senilde, mildly interested. "I suppose you would. Tell me, have you ever made any of those delightful atomic bombs?"

"Not personally," said George.

"They were my favorite toy at one time. Such a spectacle! But one wearies even of that. . . My instruments tell me that they still go off in various parts of the planet sometimes—very infrequently, though I have a large stock somewhere—but I never bother nowadays to go out and look at them."

"When was the last?" George asked.

"About twenty years ago, at a guess."

"H'm, that's roughly fourteen Terrestrial years. . . Takes us back to about 1985. Yes, there was a terrific atmospheric disturbance at one spot on Venus observed in that year. I guess that was it. There was another—photographed at Mount Wilson, back in June, 1927. And an even earlier one, in February, 1913."

"Indeed?" said Senilde, indifferently, and Mara said: "I don't know what you're talking about. Why don't you keep to the subject, which was immortality?"

"I find in these days a growing tendency of my mind to wander," said Senilde. "Where was I?"

They told him. He went on: "The reason, I found, was that the duration of life was directly linked to the degree of permeability in that part of the living cell exposed to the radiations of the universe around it, and as growth—that is, accumulation—

proceeds, so the inner cells suffer a natural and inevitable decrease in that degree of permeability. They're entombed, choked, cut off from light, starved of oxygen, denied healthy contact with exterior radiation. They die and infect the surrounding cells with the canker of death."

George said, thoughtfully: "Half a century or more ago, on Earth, a fellow named—er—Benedict—yes, H. M. Benedict—came to that conclusion after studying the senility of plants."

"Didn't he go on from there?"

"How could he?"

"I did. Nature made an error in the colloidal degree of protoplasm. I corrected it. Just a matter of the injection into the bloodstream of a perpetual solvent, which circulates, and thins out the too dense, too clinging gelatine. The cells of your body are specialists. Either they travel a fixed, confined inner circuit in your bloodstream or else they're gummed immovably in place in your flesh and bones. Fixity and specialization spell death. My body-cells are free, fluid, adaptable. When they feel the need to come to the surface, they do so. They move slowly—but they *move*. And they're versatile and continually change their functions. I could make you immortal also, if I chose to. But I shan't. You're harmless, simple people. Why should I condemn you to the nightmare of boredom I endure?"

"Is it that bad?" said George, slowly.

"Young man, I've tried every kind of pleasure a million times—from the common pleasures of sensuality to the rarer ones of labor and ascetism; intellectual pleasures and bodily pleasures, the pleasures of lust and power and humility and martyrdom. And I have exhausted them. My palate has lost nearly all sensation. Repetition of a pleasure does not increase the pleasure: it makes it pall. Looking back, I see the happiest time of my life was when I was a child, absorbed in play. I seek in my sad way to recover some of that pleasure in the childish devices you deprecate. You should not be angry with me, but sorry for me."

"I'm sorry for you," said Mara. George tried to feel sorry also, but somehow—no. Senilde had had everything. How could one feel sorry for him?

"Mara, you have a sweet nature, besides being sensible and beautiful," said Senilde. "You're something that was always pretty rare. I didn't like people much, you know. When you've lived among them for a few thousand years you've lost all your illusions about them. Beneath the layers of pretense, most people are small-hearted, incredibly selfish, dancing on the strings of self-interest."

He mused. "When I was a boy, I used to love playing with toy soldiers and staging little wars with them. When, at length, I became a bored immortal, I thought it would be fun to play those wars over again—with the live puppets. How easy it was to play on their fears, their vanities, their power-lusts! I had a grand time

inventing new machines, new weapons and new methods of attack and defense for them, watching the little men applying them—in the name of this or that. First it was local wars, then national wars, then one great planetary civil war. You were looking for the white circle headquarters, George. This is it. And I'm the commander."

"What about the green triangle H.Q.?"

"This is it also, and I its commander. They all used to come to me secretly, their generals, thinking I was running their side only. I used to laugh—they were so stiff, so serious and urgent with duty, so grateful for my guidance. Now I've forgotten even what their silly symbols were supposed to stand for—something noble and erroneous, of course."

He laughed now, his wet laugh.

"I'd put new powers in the hands of one side, and then the other—matching them evenly, tanks against tank-torpedoes, atomic bombs against bacteriological bombs. And then I grew tired of them and their petty, personal intrigues. They were always so jealous of each other, currying my favors. I was much more interested in the machines—at least they didn't fight against their own side. Anyway, human beings were becoming redundant in the war. I'd invented so many automatic weapons which could detect and recognize and engage their own targets that people were becoming just little nuisances hiding behiding them, only sitting there and ducking and hoping they wouldn't be hurt. Merely in the way. When they didn't duck in time, they were liable to clog the machines with their messy bodies."

"That's no way to talk," said George, harshly.

Senilde ignored him. "So I decided to dispense with them altogether. I presented both sides with Meknitron gas, and they obligingly saturated the planet with it and wiped themselves out almost entirely. Odd spots escaped, like the village of Fami, where a perpetual up-draft kept the ledge clear. The mechanical war went on—still goes on—but I lost interest even in that, and now I'm content to bask here at home in my own sunlight until the real sunlight returns."

There was a short silence.

Then: "Do you expect me to feel sorry for you after that genocide?" said George, wrathfully.

Senilde shrugged. "Not really. You haven't lived long enough to achieve detachment from the race. It takes at least a thousand years."

"Then, thanks, I can do without immortality."

"I wasn't thrusting it upon you. You've no need to worry."

Mara asked: "What do you mean about the sunlight returning?"

"The clouds of Meknitron which completely covered the surface of Venus have been slowly losing substance all the time. Already they've lifted, and drift miles up in the air. They'll continue gradually to disperse, and perhaps in a thousand years or so the sun will break through

again."

"I can hardly wait," said George, sarcastically. "You may be interested to learn that your gas killed one of my fellow-travelers here."

"I'm not," said Senilde.

"What I'd like to know is what made those white circle tanks first treat us as enemies, and then suddenly switch to our side and defend us against the green triangles."

Senilde frowned. "Give me more details."

George gave him a brief sketch of the battle.

"I see," said Senilde. "Well, you may have noticed that the circle and triangle tanks and vehicles are of different designs and sizes. That was deliberate on my part. Each radar detecting apparatus is supplied with reference outlines of the vehicles or aircraft of its own side. If a tank, say, detects another coming, it traces the pattern of its outline and compares it with its file. If it corresponds with any on that file, the tank thinks —in the way that a mechanism 'thinks'—that the other is friendly. But if the outline is unfamiliar, the tank acts on the assumption that the other is an enemy."

"Well?"

"When your ship landed it was vertical. White circle tanks file no vertical shapes of that kind—so they opened fire. But the fire brought your ship down to the horizontal —where it so much resembled the white circle torpedo-on-wheels that it passed muster as a friend. Similarly, the green triangle tanks registered it as an enemy. Now do you understand?"

"Yes. But the great steel wheels?"

"Oh, that's a weapon common to both sides, like guns. Clever notion of mine, don't you think? Dates back to the days of the humans—used to paralyze them with fear. Useful either for cutting them to pieces or pinning them down until they can be pulverized by artillery."

"You're a pleasant character, Senilde. If I were—" George broke off as another thought crossed his mind. "Look," he said, urgently, "my friends should soon be restoring our ship to the upright position, using the white circle tanks as haulers."

Senilde smiled. "Then they'll get a surprise. As soon as the tanks have done that job, they'll register the ship as an enemy again, and turn around and blast it to pieces."

"Then, for heaven's sake, stop sending power out to those infernal machines!"

"That," said Senilde, plaintively, "would mean my climbing to the top floor and messing about with switches and things. I hate climbing stairs. No, the effort's not worth it. That's my final answer."

George hissed with exasperation. "Then *I'll* go," he stormed. "Where is it?"

"You'll never find the control room —there's a secret panel or two and all kinds of safety devices. Besides, I don't want you prying—"

A bell rang sweetly high on the wall.

"Ah!" exclaimed Senilde. "This is

my lucky day. We have another visitor. Who is it, I wonder? Let's see."

He walked out of the lounge. For a moment George and Mara stared at each other, and then George threw up his arms. "It's maddening to want to kill a man you can't kill. Where's the old fool going now?"

"The best way to find out," said Mara, practically, "is to follow him. I'd like to see who the visitor is, too."

She went out after Senilde, and George tagged along behind.

Senilde was standing in the gloomy cavern of the hall behind the portico staring out at the garden. In the distance a little figure was coming up the drive, approaching the big fountain. Senilde was already shaking with anticipatory glee.

George unslung his telescope and levelled it. The newcomer was a mere stick of a man, old, shriveled, knock-kneed, in a one-piece tunic so dirty that its original color was unplaceable. However, he seemed at ease, walking with slow calm. When the fountain performed, he walked steadily through the shower, not changing his pace, but only his expression, which became one of disgust.

Mara asked if she could look through the telescope, and George passed it to her.

"Why, it's Leep!" she exclaimed.

Senilde looked round and asked what instrument she was using. Either he'd never seen telescopes before or else they'd passed out of use on Venus so long ago that he'd quite forgotten them. George lent him it, and he was fascinated by it and watched every movement of Leep's with absorption. Leep didn't sit on any seats, and when he neared the sticky patch he seemed to divine its existence and location and walked carefully around it. Senilde sighed with disappointment. Then he whispered: "The step will catch him."

It didn't. Leep avoided the step, and came in through the side of the portico.

Mara greeted him in their own language. It came through the Teleo simply as "Hello, Leep."

Leep didn't seem much surprised either at her or their presence, and replied casually.

Mara said: "Oh, no, I've only just come. I've been back to have a look at Fami. How did you escape?"

George had dug out another Teleo outfit, and now he handed it to Leep. Mara explained its nature, and the seer put it on. Senilde watched Leep rather sulkily, his expression saying that this fellow promises poor sport.

Leep said: "I told everyone that the overhang was about to fall on the village, and they believed me, of course, and yet the fools hoped irrationally that somehow it wouldn't be so bad as I predicted. They'd become such creatures of habit that they couldn't bring themselves to leave Fami, and they talked themselves into staying. I didn't want to die, so I came down the glacier the way you did. And then I wandered about the foot-hills looking for this place. I knew it existed, but I was uncertain of its exact location. I

could only divine it was somewhere this way—I've been looking for it for three days and I'm very hungry. Is there any food here?"

Senilde had lost interest in Leep, and was staring at distant prospects through the telescope.

So George said: "I've a little food, Leep. Come on in."

Senilde didn't demur. He was intent on playing with the new toy. He walked out into the garden with it, testing its power. The other three returned to the lounge, and George opened his provision box, and Leep ate food bars with relish.

"Why did you choose to come here?" asked George.

Leep said: "So far as I'm aware, it's the only habitation for many hundreds of miles. I thought Mara would have come here, and I wanted to find her."

"Why?" asked Mara.

He addressed her directly. "Because when my stupid disciples disappeared under the ice with the others, I had no one left to steal for me. You were the best artist in the village, Mara, and I hoped you'd now steal for me. Senilde must have plenty of food in this place somewhere."

"I suppose so, but we've never seen any of it," said Mara. "And why should I steal for you? Why don't you steal for yourself?"

"My talents are solely of the mind," said Leep, sadly. "I live only to think. My ideal existence is unending meditation. I'm quite impractical, as you know. I shall starve to death unless people find and give me food."

"What can you give in return?" asked George.

"The fruits of my knowledge. I was born with a gift for knowing things, a kind of second sight. It is erratic, patchy. I can't command it. Odd items of information drift into my mind as I meditate, and they're often useful either to me or others. But I can only accept what is vouchsafed me. Sometimes it's only partial, like the location of this house, and no effort of mine will enlarge that knowledge."

"A sensitive, eh?" said George. "Your faculty isn't unknown to us Earthlings. We've detected it among our own kind, on our planet, and experimented with it—we call it extra-sensory perception, and, as you say, it isn't to be commanded."

"You come from another planet? I didn't even know that."

George rather liked the little old man, and told him about Earth, the journey here, and the subsequent happenings. He finished: "And as Mara and I are in love, I want to take her back to Earth with me. So you can't, I'm afraid, have her as your 'artist.' However, I suggest you come with us back to Earth. Real, live Venusians seem to be very rare specimens: you'd be a fine capture for me—but quite free, you understand. The Terrestrials would make much of you, honor you, listen to you, and certainly feed you."

"But would they leave me alone to meditate?"

"Eventually," said George, hesitantly.

"I see." The old man pondered. "There seems little choice. I must go where the food is. Being hungry is terrible, and spoils my concentration completely."

"Good," said George. "Now listen, Leep. Concealed somewhere in this house is a room containing the master switches controlling the power behind this idiotic war. See if you can divine where it is—"

He dropped his voice and broke off as Senilde came in. The fat man said, genially: "This telescope is a most intriguing toy, George. What can I trade you for it? Are you prepared to deal? Do you really need this girl? There must be others about the planet somewhere, and I could find you one—"

"Shut up!" said George, savagely.

Mara pinched him gently, and he glanced at her. Covertly, she went through the motion of turning a switch. He got it. He turned to Senilde and said curtly: "Switch off the war and you can have the telescope."

"Is that all?" said Senilde, eagerly. "Oh, well, that can be done."

"I want to make sure it *is* done," said George. "My condition is that I see it done."

"Of course."

George rose from the couch. He was still holding a food bar. He proffered it to Senilde. "Here, I'll throw this in, too."

"What is it?"

"Food—good food."

Senilde waved it away. "I never eat. Haven't eaten for thousands of years. I've no need to. Bodily immortality alters one's metabolism entirely. I draw sufficient nourishment from my environment automatically, without that rather disgusting—if you'll forgive me—procedure."

Leep sat up, and his ears pricked up like an animal's. George tossed him the food bar, and remarked to Senilde: "You're a lucky man. Now let's go up all those awful stairs."

Mara joined them. George said: "Coming, Leep?"

"No, thank you," said the old man. "I feel I've got a thinking spell coming on. I'll just sit here."

There weren't many floors, but Senilde made heavy going of the stairs. However healthy his cells might be, centuries of lack of exercise had done nothing for his muscles or his wind. But he was right: George would never have found the room. That part of the house was like a Chinese puzzle box, sliding panels behind sliding panels, secret passages within secret passages, concealed springs which could only function after other concealed springs had been pressed.

The room itself was full of control panels; tiny lights winked everywhere, and an electric hum permeated it. Things like ticker tapes were clicking out printed messages, and rows of spools revolved slowly and jerkily, winding them on. Senilde indicated them, grinning asininely. "All in different codes, and I can't remember one of them now. Once, I used to read them all."

"Do any of them give the location of our ship?" asked George.

"Several of them, no doubt, but how do I know which ones? I can't decipher a word."

George grunted, disappointed.

Senilde started snapping switches off. One by one at first, then in banks, the little lights went out. The message machines stopped. The hum faded slowly. Then all the apparatus was still, silent, dead.

"There you are," said Senilde, and George felt a great relief. The skipper, Sparks, and the mate should be safe now. And the ship would have to stay where it was until he got back to it —he couldn't, now, be left behind on Venus.

"Thank you," said George, and squeezed Mara's arm in gratitude for the result of her suggestion.

They came out through the maze of secret ways, which Senilde closed behind them. When they got down to the lounge again, Leep was still sitting there quietly.

George said: "Hello, had any inspirations?"

Leep looked at him thoughtfully. "Yes. I've been thinking of your ship, and suddenly the exact latitude and longitude of its position came to me."

George beamed. "Now we're getting somewhere. You're a smart fellow, Leep. Where is it?"

"The Teleo conveys an ambiguous meaning to that word 'smart'," said Leep. "You're correct in the sense that I have a strong instinct for self-preservation."

"What do you mean? It's certainly in your interest to help us locate the ship so that you can come to Earth with us."

"I don't very much want to go to Earth now," said Leep. "If I go, you'll feed me, but I shall be continually harassed and importuned to use my gifts for others, to become a common fortune-teller. I'm an old man and in the normal way shan't live much longer. I resent any limitation of my time for meditation. I've always resented the time wasted on the necessity for getting food. No, I'm quite willing to give up my place in the ship to Senilde here."

"To go to Earth?" said Senilde. "Why should I want to go to Earth?"

Leep dropped his gaze. He picked at the carpet. "You have exhausted every pleasure of Venus. You're bored sick. On Earth there must be multitudinous new pleasures which you've never tasted, never imagined, probably. And the Earthlings are very short-lived. With your wisdom, experience, authority, and permanent existence you couldn't help becoming their ruler very soon: it's inevitable that an immortal should rule mere mortals."

George's mouth had dropped open as wide as Senilde's. Then he glared, and said angrily: "Pipe down, Machiavelli. I'd got the wrong idea about you, you egocentric little twister. Who are you to dispense passages on our ship—not to mention the dictatorship of our planet? I take whom *I* choose—and it's no longer you."

Leep said softly: "You can't take

anybody if you can't find the ship. I can tell you this: it's very far from here. It would take weeks to walk there, even if you walked in the right direction. If you didn't, it might take months, years, or eternity."

Mara said: "In return for letting us and Senilde find the ship and go to Earth, you want Senilde to give you the secret of immortality, don't you?"

"That's it, of course," said George.

"I don't deny it," said Leep. "I have set my heart on becoming an immortal. To meditate—for ever, without distraction! For such a prize, naturally, I would fight and bargain with all I possess or anyone else possesses."

"You bargain in vain," said Senilde. "I shall save you from yourself. Immortality is a curse. You would become as bored as I, and long for death, as often I have done."

"Such altruism," said Leep, sarcastically. "The truth is that you're jealous of your uniqueness, and you would fear a rival. Actually, you've nothing to fear from me. The only power I seek is over myself, over the labyrinths of my mind. The whole universe lies in a man's mind, as he'll discover if he contemplates that mind long enough. The trouble has always been that his life is too short."

"I've lived long enough," said Senilde, "and I've discovered nothing worth eternal life."

"I spoke of a *man's* mind," said Leep, scornfully. "Yours is the mind of an infant—it never became anything else. A clever, tinkering infant, with certain technical aptitudes. Emotionally, spiritually, morally, and intellectually you remained immature, with only one aim: pleasure. Crude, immediate pleasure. There's nothing in you of timeless serenity, the spirit of contemplation. No wonder you're bored. The boon of immortality is wasted on you. Let me have it. I know how to use it. You go to Earth and have your childish fun. They'll probably appreciate your surprise fountains and squeaking cushions there, and put you in the kindergarten where you belong."

Senilde's slack mouth had fallen more and more open during this abuse, and now he shut it tightly. Hatred gleamed in his pale eyes.

"The last thing I'd want to do is to perpetuate a mean and spiteful creature like you," he said. "As for going to Earth, I'd probably get more pleasure in just sitting here and watching you starve to death. I always liked the particular pleasure resident in sadism. No one's going to talk to me like that and expect to get away with it. You fear hunger and death more than anything. Right, then you can die of hunger. Slowly. And while we're waiting, just to show you how useless your bargaining counter is, we'll find the ship ourselves."

He turned away, beckoning George and Mara to follow him.

He led them into a wing of the house which they'd not previously visited. They followed him through a door and found themselves in a great covered space like an airplane

hangar. Almost filling it, looming up over them so that they had to crane their necks to see the top of it, was a tank even larger than the single green triangle one which had shelled the ship. But this one bore no gun nor any distinguishing mark. Also, it was of different design, with a high turret crowned by a sort of railed look-out platform.

"I call this my war chariot," said Senilde. "I often used it to travel around in and observe the battles. Its outline is filed in both the circle and the triangle radar detectors, and so it's registered as a friend by both sides. But just in case of accidents or stray shells, it's very heavily armored and it'll stand up to most things—except a wheeled torpedo. But I've never had any trouble in it, and usually I've remained aloft on the platform throughout the battles quite safely."

"You seem to have gone to a deal of trouble to safeguard your immortality," said George, drily.

Senilde said seriously: "If a shell blew me apart, I might take a long time to grow together again."

George's imagination boggled at the vision. He wondered if Senilde were fooling himself or them. There must be limits to this immortality proposition.

Senilde did something George didn't see which caused the whole of the far wall to split and open in the form of two massive doors, revealing the gray Venusian landscape beyond.

"By the way," said Senilde, "we'll probably be out for some days. You'd better bring your food along."

When George returned with the provision box, the great tank was standing outside the doors, in the garden, its engine beating steadily, and Senilde and Mara were up on the look-out platform waiting for him. He clambered up the steel rungs to them, carrying the box awkwardly.

Mara asked: "Did you leave any food for Leep?"

"No," said George, tersely. "If we fail to find the ship on this trip, we may find on our return that hunger has softened Leep's obstinacy. In exchange for a couple of food bars, he may decide after all to divulge where the ship is."

"Perhaps," said Mara. "But Leep isn't a weak character. He doesn't give in easily."

"Neither do I," said George.

Senilde was listening and idly fingering pointers on a dial. He said: "All we want from Leep are two numbers—those of the cross-lines to which to set these pointers. Then we'd only have to sit back, for the chariot would take us to the spot automatically. Couldn't we use the Teleo to extract them from his mind? I mean, if we all kept talking to him about the ship's position, the numbers are certain to cross his mind sooner or later, and we might pick up that thought—"

"He's not such a fool," said George. "He'd switch off his outfit the moment he saw what we were trying to do. He'd probably refuse to wear it at all."

"No, there's no chance that way," Mara agreed. "Leep has perfect mind control."

ALL that day, and the next, and for several more days after that, the huge tank rumbled about the land, quartering areas and searching methodically. But there was an awful lot of land. The poor visibility made it necessary to beat back and forth across wastes which, had the light been better, could have been seen at a glance to be bare. Senilde clung to his treasured telescope and never seemed to tire of observing with it.

They skirted great mountain ranges, forded wide, shallow rivers, zig-zagged and circled over endless plains. Sometimes they saw other tanks, and war machines of both sides, all static and silent. To the impatient George, their own tank moved with infuriating slowness.

Once he said to Senilde: "Haven't you something less ponderous—something faster and more manoeuvreable? Say something like one of those rocket-propelled wheeled torpedoes?"

"No. The torpedoes are out of the question, on three counts. One, there's no cabin in them or carrying place for observation. Two, unlike this tank, they're not self-powered. To get one moving, I'd have to start the whole war going again, which would be dangerous for your friends. Three, it would be dangerous for us too, because the torpedoes are legitimate targets for the green triangle tanks and bombers."

After a week of vain search, Senilde became bored and insisted on returning to his house. They wanted to continue, but it wasn't their chariot, so they had to return with him.

Leep was still there, in the lounge, looking even thinner, and very pale. There were dark circles under his eyes: he'd not been able to sleep much because of his hunger pains. But he managed a faint smile when he saw them, and murmured: "Yes, it's very difficult when you've no idea where to look, isn't it?"

Nobody answered.

That night George slept using the provision box for a pillow. The box was locked, but he couldn't be sure that Leep, despite his protestations of his ineptitude as an "artist," wouldn't try to steal the key.

In the middle of the night, Mara crept to Leep's side with two handfuls of food bars. He stopped just long enough to say "Thank you, child" before he seized them and devoured the lot. Afterwards, he sighed: "Oh, Mara, this cursed servitude of mind to food! Why weren't we designed to live on air, as Senilde does? Why did you steal for me, Mara?"

They were speaking softly in their own language, Teleos switched off.

"I'm a woman. I'm not hard, like a man. And I'm not ungrateful. In Fami, you often gave me good advice—for nothing. I cannot stand by and see you die like this. But why don't you try stealing for yourself, Leep? It's so easy."

"He was sleeping with his head

on the box. It was impossible—"

"Nothing is impossible. I merely held up his head while I slid the box aside—"

"I haven't the touch for such feats . . . Mara, would you steal again for me?"

"I . . . don't know. There aren't many bars left, and George must not go hungry—"

"I don't mean food. While you've been away, I've been searching this house, both physically and with my mind. There's a room upstairs all of steel, and inside—I divine it—is a sealed bottle containing the fluid of immortality. Senilde has preserved it ever since he first used it. One needs such a tiny dose to flower into an immortal! But the steel door is locked and barred. Also, it's ringed around with protective devices which would kill an unwary thief: falling knives that would behead one, stabbing, poisoned needles that spring from hidden sockets. I know where they are, but I don't know how to deal with them nor how to open the door. Such things were not unknown in Fami, and you are the best thief ever known. With my knowledge and your ability, we could procure that bottle. And then, immortal, we could defy Senilde."

She said: "I don't want to be immortal. And if I were not, Senilde would kill me when he discovered what I'd done."

"If we could cover our traces, that discovery is likely to be long delayed. You could escape meantime."

"Why should I run these risks for you? No."

"I didn't expect you to do it from charity. Remember, I have a bargaining counter. Do this for me and I shall give you the position of the space-ship. Then you and your Earthman can escape in Senilde's war chariot—it's his only conveyance: he can't overtake you. You can use it to go to the space-ship. Then you can fly to Earth with your man—Senilde can't reach you there."

"Maybe he can."

"No, Mara, you overestimate him. His body may be immortal but his mind is nearing second childhood. It has all the signs of approaching senility—memory lapses, mind wandering, petulance, and so forth. People who never really grow out of their first childhood are always prone to early mental decay. In another few years Senilde will become a witless and vacant-minded fool, forgetting even his own identity, wandering aimlessly about, never able to die."

Mara shuddered. "Horrible!"

"But a fact. You were never afraid of facts . . . Well, Mara?"

"I'll think about it."

"Don't delay too long. I shall be a hungry man again tomorrow. And, remember—*your* food won't last forever. You must get to the ship to be saved from eventual starvation. Desperate situations call for desperate actions, Mara."

IN the morning, in the garden, she took George aside. She confessed

to her theft of the food, and George exploded.

"Why the hell did you give it to him? Don't you understand that the food is the one trump card we have to use against him? I know it's harsh, but we'll never get the ship's position from him in any other way."

"But we can," she said, and told him of Leep's proposition.

George frowned. "I hold no brief for Senilde, but after all, he has given us his admittedly queer hospitality, and he's helping us to find the ship. And his remarkable discovery is his property, not ours. Whereas, Leep is entirely selfish and calculating. He always seems to expect people to act like his disciples, doing everything for him while he sits and does nothing. He takes, but won't give. He refuses to come to Earth because it might inconvenience him—"

"He's not a wild animal to be caged and taken there as a specimen," she said. "His life is his own, not yours."

"Oh, so now you're taking *his* side. He's from the old home town, and I'm only a callous alien."

"Don't be silly, George."

"It's you who's silly. If we hold him off long enough, he'll come crawling to us and begging us to take him to Earth, where there's food."

"I've told you before, George. I've never liked the use of brutality as a means of getting what you want. You're no credit to your planet, and if they're all like you there, I'll change my mind about coming."

"Then you can stay here or go to hell!" he shouted.

It was their first real quarrel. They were glaring at each other when Senilde came from a path through the undergrowth beside them.

"Certainly you can stay here, Mara, my dear," he said. "For ever, if you wish. As George doesn't want you now, I'll make you an immortal to keep me company."

George rounded on him, snarling. "You stay out of this."

"You're rude and ungrateful, George. After all I've done to help and amuse you!"

George snorted. "Amuse me! Look, I want to go out and have another look for that ship. I'll go alone if you don't want to come."

"Why should I mind where you go?"

"I shall want to use the chariot, of course."

"Why 'of course'? It's mine, not yours. You're too possessive."

"He certainly is," said Mara.

Senilde smiled at her, and said: "I'm glad we're seeing eye to eye at last, Mara. George, I'll make you a proposition. You may have the chariot for you own, as a gift, if—"

"If what?"

"If you'll give me Mara in return."

George made a noise of disgust. "She doesn't belong to me. Why ask me?"

Mara said: "I don't belong to anyone."

She turned her back on them both and walked quickly into the house. Senilde gave a cracked, high laugh.

"She's not only sweet, sensible, and beautiful—she also has spirit."

George said, scornfully: "Still looking for new toys and games, eh?"

"A new toy, yes," said Senilde, softly, "but an old game."

George felt like hitting him again, but he remembered Senilde's protective stunner, and let his fist slowly uncoil. Mara was right in one thing: violence was small help when dealing with people like this. You had to be diplomatic. It was no good getting mad when you wanted favors from people. If he were to have another chance to search for the ship, he must try to restore the surface appearance of friendliness with Senilde. There's no bore like an old bore, he thought cheerlessly, and braced himself for the ordeal.

"Talking about games," he said, as casually as he could, "this garden must be chock full of tricks like the fountain and the seat."

"Oh, it is," said Senilde, eagerly. "Let me show you them."

The affliction of silliness went on for over an hour, and at the end of it he got the hard-earned reward: permission to take the chariot out to scout for the rest of the day in a direction they'd not explored. "On two conditions," said Senilde. "You must return it by nightfall. You must not take Mara with you."

"I don't intend to take Mara," said George, stiffly.

"Good. I think I'll go and play with Leep for a bit. He was weakening fast last night, though he seems to have staged something of a rally this morning. But it won't last. I want to see him suffer. He'll never leave this place as long as he thinks he has a chance of getting my secret. By the time he realizes he has no chance at all, he'll be too weak to move. I'm looking forward to that."

CAPTAIN Freiburg looked at the three long, joined cables spraying from near the ship's nose to their respective white circle tanks. There had been no more attacks, and the work on the fins had gone on at a spanking pace. It was finished well before his pessimistic estimate. Apart from the radio, the ship was as good as new. It needed now only pulling up onto its tail.

"Fine," he said. "I'm sure that'll do it. The angles are right. If only the cables hold. . ."

"I'm sure they will, sir," said the mate.

Sparks' lip was beginning to heal now, but his enforced taciturnity had become a habit and he made no comment.

The skipper scanned the gray sky and then the misty plain. Nothing stirred.

"Well, let's go," he said. "Remember—at five after noon exactly. On the dot."

Their watches had been synchronized to the second. Each man climbed into his tank, Freiburg taking the center one. For a moment he sat there regarding the blank video screen and thought again of his set at home, the chair, the slippers. . . Well, if this worked, he'd have a good

chance of getting back to them. If it didn't, it looked as though they were sunk. Unless George returned with some help. Every day he had hoped to hear the buzz of the helicopter, George hastening back with good news. But there'd been no sound except that of their own hammering.

He reached out and turned the video switch. He waited, while the screen looked blankly back at him. Gradually his own face became as blank. Then he jiggled the switch. Nothing happened. He switched on the engine. Nothing happened.

He groaned, and swore. He flipped switches and levers about, and the response added up to nil. Everything was lifeless.

He stuck his head out of the turret and bawled to the others: "Are your tanks working?"

Their heads bobbed up almost together. "No, sir."

His heart sank. He was "Jonah" again. Wearily, he climbed out of the tank and lit a cigarette. He wondered how long the power had been shut off, and why it had been. The steel loops of the cables, which had taken so long to form, hung gracefully—and mockingly.

He told the other two with a hopefulness he didn't feel: "We'll have to keep trying at intervals. Maybe it'll come on again soon."

GEORGE, up on the observation platform of Senilde's chariot as it lumbered along, looked back at the dwindling bulk of that crazy great house and saw it slowly recede into the arms of the foot-hills and disappear. There was an ache in his heart he tried to deny. Why did love tremble on a razor's edge with a pit of hate on either side? Why, when you lost your balance, did the loved one and yourself so suddenly alter into quite different people? What alchemy could thus change one violent passion into its opposite in so short a time?

The real pain came with the slow change back. He saw the quarrel now as just a stupid projection of his own conflict. He wanted very much to find the skipper and the ship again. Because he thought Mara's machinations with Leep were jeopardizing that chance, he rounded on her. All the more because he wanted her too. He feared to lose her, he feared to lose the chance of getting back to Earth, and these fears preyed on him and made him taut, resentful, ready to fly off the handle.

Now he regretted it. His love for Mara came growing back stronger than before. If he had to choose between Mara and the ship now, it would be Mara. Yet here he was, steadily driving away from Mara and towards (he hoped) the ship—so perverse a thing was pride.

However, he'd be back by nightfall. He'd have to. It was cunning of Senilde to keep Mara as a pledge for the return of his chariot. Senilde knew that he was still crazy about her. Yes, he'd return—even if he found the ship, he'd return. For her. He'd patch up this childish quarrel the moment he got back.

The house was quite gone now, and even the enfolding hills were fading in the mist. But still he looked back. The mighty engine of the tank throbbed under his feet and the rattling caterpillar tracks slid steadily around, carrying the monster blindly over the plain.

Nevertheless, he heard the creak of the stairway cover being lifted, and swung round to see Mara climb out of the body of the turret. Relief fought with his annoyance at being fooled, but when she smiled at him, his petty irritation dissolved on the instant. He caught hold of her and kissed her again and again, and ended the quarrel without a word.

When he allowed her to talk, she said: "The cross-line numbers are 593 and 871. Put them on the pointers."

He was very surprised, but he obeyed the injunction, regarding her with raised eyebrows. The tank immediately altered course by over twenty degrees. He'd been on the wrong track.

"So Leep told you, after all," he said.

"I stole the immortality fluid for him."

He smote his forehead.

She said, quickly: "It was the only thing to do. Why should Senilde so torture him? You don't understand Senilde. He's cruel and unscrupulous. He has tried several times to take me from you. Because you have loyal qualities, you credit him with some. Leep can be selfish, yes, but Senilde is wholly so. If you took him to Earth, he would try to repeat there the pattern he made on Venus: a great war, with himself as warlord, growing crazier every year."

"It's possible—even probable—you're right," he said. "You mustn't think I had any great trust in him. The thing was, I had to be careful. I'd thought more than once of you and I running away with this chariot, leaving him, while we sought for the ship ourselves. But there were two things to be considered. We may never have come across the ship, and as Leep was the only remaining hope, and he wouldn't leave the house, we had to stay there on good terms with the owner. The other thing is that directly Senilde discovered we'd stolen his chariot, he'd start the war going again, which, if my friends raise our ship, would spell their doom—and ours. We'd be condemned to this planet and starvation or Senilde's vengeance—whichever finished us first. And now I fear you've done exactly that to us. When Senilde finds out what you've done—"

"He's not likely to find out about the theft for a long time, if ever. After I neutralized his safeguards to the steel room, I restored them exactly as they were. I took only a little of the fluid—it is colorless, so I replaced what I'd stolen with water and resealed the bottle. Why should he ever suspect?"

"That's not the point, Mara. I promised to be back at night-fall. If the ship is so far off that we cannot return by night-fall, he'll be put on inquiry right away. When he finds you're gone too, he'll suspect we con-

spired to steal his chariot. Then the war will start again—just what I didn't want to happen."

"What about your bargain with him? He was to stop the war in return for your telescope."

"You're a funny girl, Mara. You've just said he's not to be trusted. Do you expect him to honor that agreement now? Anyhow, he *did* stop the war—but there was no mention of his never starting it again. And to complete the matter—"

He pointed to his telescope, which was still lying at the back of the ledge under the pointers, where Senilde had left it after the last trip.

"No, our only hope," he continued, "is that the ship isn't too far away. If we can reach it, mark its position, and return the chariot by night-fall, perhaps we can get away later somehow without trouble. Or if we can reach the ship by night-fall, we might yet escape in it before the trouble starts. If it takes us longer, then things may not be pleasant."

He picked up the telescope and looked hopefully ahead. His free arm stole around Mara's waist.

DUSK crept over Senilde's garden, but in his lounge the artificial sun did not dim. Leep lay there basking in its light, feeling happier than at any time before in his life. To think and dream, to play endlessly within his mind, beyond harm, beyond distraction. . . He faced eternity with contentment.

The other immortal was not so content.

Senilde paced restlessly in and out. "Where has he got to?" he kept asking himself and Leep. But Leep merely smiled abstractedly and never answered. After all, he was supposed to be starving, conserving his strength.

"And where is Mara?" Senilde asked as often, and as often elicited no response.

Finally, when the star-less, pitch-black Venusian night descended, he came in from the garden in a rage.

"They've run off in my chariot!" he wailed, in a high, thin, complaining voice. "They've taken my telescope, too. Oh, I was a fool to let him have the chariot on any conditions. But not such a fool as he was to think he could get away with it. I'll bomb the country for miles around. I'll blow them and their space-ship to fragments."

He turned to go to the control room. With surprising agility, Leep sprang up and barred his way to the door.

"What's this?" said Senilde, suddenly becoming calm and cold.

"Leave them alone," said Leep, quietly.

Senilde looked at him freezingly for a moment, then reached out and touched him lightly on the chest. Leep looked slightly puzzled, but stood his ground. Senilde looked very much more puzzled. His electrical stunner should have laid Leep on his back, unconscious. It had never failed with any other mortal. Any other *mortal!* Had Leep, then, after all—?

Senilde flashed his hand down

among the folds of his monkish gown. It came up gripping a small, flat pistol. He shot three radio-active needles into Leep's chest before the little man wrenched the gun from him.

Leep said: "Don't be such a silly child." And he did not fall, writhing, as he should have done.

Senilde glared at him, his weak, ugly mouth open, dribbling. He still had one advantage over Leep: bulk. He used it suddenly, shouldering Leep out of the way. The seer lost his balance, and fell. He was soon up, but Senilde had vanished.

Behind the wall, at the foot of the stairs, was a concealed elevator Senilde had thought it politic not to show George or Mara. He always liked to keep a few tricks up his sleeve.

When Leep reached the vicinity of the control room, knowing where it was, Senilde was already inside. Leep knew that, too. But he didn't know how to open the secret ways. He tried, but he never could understand mechanism of any kind. He was baffled.

Inside, the room stirred to life again. The hum rose till it became a near-shriek, the lights fluttered like a thousand winking eyes, the messages from the war machines and all the hidden observation posts came pouring in, yards of them, in the codes Senilde could no longer remember. It was provoking for him, because he knew that some of them must relate to the position not only of the space-ship but also of his runaway chariot.

He worked hard at the controls, organizing the biggest all-out attack yet. It was a pity that the target area also was the biggest yet. If only he knew where they were. . .

THE war chariot plowed on through the night, its searchlights probing and lighting the way before it. It was cold up there on the platform, but they had to be there to see if they could spot the ship ahead of them.

Down in the body of the tank was Senilde's cabin, wherein he slept on long journeys, after he'd set the chariot on its course. But they couldn't sleep now if they tried. How could they sleep, not knowing how near to their salvation they were, nor how far vengeance was riding behind them? Besides, if there were no lookout, they'd run the considerable risk of crashing headlong into the space-ship, crushing and killing.

There was another control panel in Senilde's cabin, complete with TV screen and radar detectors, but he'd not shown them how to manipulate it, and it was too late and too dangerous to start playing trial and error games now. It was safer to stick to known procedure.

"Listen!" said George, suddenly. They listened. Gradually rising above the noise of the engine and the clanking treads came a deep booming hum.

"Airplanes!" George exclaimed. "The war's begun again."

The night sky was becoming a

great sounding board now.

Doo-oom, doo-oom, doo-oom—the most menacing, soul-chilling sound George had ever heard. There must be something like a thousand planes up there. The throbbing growl vibrated down at them, grew even louder, seemed to be pulsating from all sides.

With thin shrieks which swelled to howls, the bombs began to fall.

LULLED into a sense of at least temporary security by the long peace, the three men had gone back to making the ship their living quarters.

But Captain Freiburg wasn't sleeping so well that night. The unexpected frustration of the plan to hoist the ship right way up had unsettled him, and the self-pity, which the days of hard labor and hope had dissolved, began to crystallize in him again. Why did fate always with-hold from his ventures that final approving seal of luck?

Gradually, into his dismal private thoughts edged the distant drone of aircraft. But he wasn't really aware of it until the rumble of the bombing was superimposed on it.

He jumped up and made a tour of the port-holes. From almost every segment of the horizon he could see the clouds reflecting the jumping flashes like summer lightning. The raid was a long way off, but it meant that the war had started up again, and in a place like this you never knew what might suddenly hit you.

He roused the others and made them move back into their less comfortable beds in a shell crater. But none of them slept any more that night. The war remained distant, but it was more than an air raid now. They kept hearing the firing of artillery and the different, heavier sound of exploding shells.

And once they heard, also distant, the terrifying wail of one of the great steel wheels rushing unseen through the night.

Sparks shivered at the sound. "Lord," he said, "I hope no more of *those* come our way."

The mate crouched lower in his hole and said nothing.

The skipper said: "We'd better disconnect the cables in case our tanks start moving off into battle dragging the ship behind them. If only it were light and we could see what we were doing, I'd try to get the ship up before they got any such ideas."

They unhitched the cables, but the tanks never moved. The three men lay waiting for dawn.

GEORGE had made Mara go down into the shelter of the turret. He himself retreated partially into it, merely sticking his head up through the hole in the platform now and again to snatch glimpses ahead, lest there be any sign of the ship.

The night air was full of flying missiles, whole or in fragments, none deliberately aimed at them, so far as he could judge, but far too many of them coming dangerously near. Gun flashes danced about in the darkness

like jumping squibs, and once he saw the glowing jet of a wheeled torpedo overhaul and pass the lumbering chariot like an express train. The shafts of their own headlights often showed tanks weaving about as thick as bugs in their path, but there were no collisions: the smaller tanks always skipped out of the giant's way in time.

They were protected from deliberate assault by the pattern of their tank, but they were open to accidental hits from blind spots. And now many of the tanks seemed to be firing blindly round the compass, and the bombing had reached a degree that could only be described as indiscriminate.

Through the apparatus of his control room, Senilde was lashing out wildly, not caring what was smashed so long as they were among the victims.

The tank jolted occasionally from glancing hits, which its tremendously thick armor withstood, and shell splinters hissed and pinged about its superstructure. But it trundled on steadily, and was still going when the dull Venusian dawn came filtering through the gloom.

WITH the dawn, and the war still somewhere over the horizon, the Captain ventured out to test the three tanks. Yes, they were definitely back on the power beam.

He surveyed the smudgy length of the sky-line. The daylight robbed the explosive flashes of much of their strength and urgency. Perhaps the war would not come this way at all, or at least it might hold off for the morning.

And it should only be a morning's work to get the ship up.

He made his decision. "Sparks!" he called. "And you, Mister. Let's get these cables hitched on again."

They wasted no time, and presently the ship began slowly to rise as the three tanks tugged away in bottom gear.

IT was daylight, and the chariot seemed to be leaving the war center behind it. At least, in this direction there were few tanks, either white circle or green triangle, and there'd been no bombing for a couple of hours.

They were both up on the lookout platform again, peering ahead. But still the plain rolled on with a hint of the ship.

"Mara," said George, expressing a doubt that had been worrying him for some time, "do you think Leep might have bluffed you? Perhaps he didn't know the ship's position at all, perhaps he just pretended to so that he'd get what he wanted. A nice thing if these *are* fake figures, if we're heading straight for nowhere with Senilde out to kill us, while Leep sits back laughing—secure in his immortality."

"I've never known Leep to lie," she said, "but I couldn't say that he never would."

"He said he would fight for the prize of immortality with all he possessed," said George. "If that includ-

ed—what's that noise? Listen—a high-pitched noise. Can you hear it?"

She listened. "Yes, but only just."

It was a thin, screeching note only just within the register of their hearing. George levelled his telescope, searching for the origin of the sound—it didn't appear to emanate from the chariot.

Soon it became visible, far to starboard. There was a squat machine, standing stationary on the plain. On the apex of an assembly of multitudinous gears it bore a revolving axle. Strung along the axle, and spinning with it at incredible speed, were four of the twenty-foot steel wheels.

Even as they watched, a forked metal arm reached up from the machine's interior and slowly edged one of the outer wheels off the end of the axle. It dropped a couple of feet to the ground, landing neatly on its edge, and darted off at rocket-speed. As the contact with earth began to slow it a little, the note of the whirling flutes slowly dropped. When the wheel became small and was disappearing far away, it had begun to howl: *Wheeeee-eeee.*

"I told you about those things," said George. "Don't be afraid—they're only dangerous if you happen to be in their path, and these are going away from us. So that's the launching gear, eh? It looks fairly simple. Look, there goes another."

They were absorbed in watching the disk attack launched, and they didn't return their attention to their route until they'd seen the last dully-gleaming wheel drop and bowl swiftly off.

"Wish we could spare the time to wait and see how the apparatus gets its refills," said George, turning. "Good grief!"

He'd just seen, far ahead, a faint, dark stroke in the mist, the body of the space-ship. It seemed magically held (the cables were invisible to the naked eye at this distance) at an angle of seventy degrees to the ground.

He turned the telescope on it and saw the cables and the three straining tanks. Inch by inch, the ship was being pulled back onto its tail, approaching the perpendicular.

Senilde had told him that so long as the ship was out of the perpendicular, if only by a degree or two, it would still be safe. But the moment it became again exactly vertical, as it must do if the fins were correctly re-aligned (and the skipper wouldn't dream of raising the ship until they had been) then things would click in all the detectors in range, and—

He bit his lip and thumped the platform rail with his fist till it hurt.

"How can I warn them?" he said, in agony. "How can I warn them?"

Mara said: "They must be able to see us. They'll stop."

But steadily the ship rose towards the fatal ninety degrees, pulled by its potential assassins. Seventy-five degrees, seventy-six, seventy-seven—

EVEN before, in the video, the skipper saw the great tank coming, the instruments in his tank had detected it with a little flutter of

nervous movements. They had taken its measure. Was it friend or foe? He could see neither circle nor triangle on it. Nor did it appear to mount any armament.

Was this the vehicle of some neutral force? Some Venusian peacemakers?

Or was it a trick and a trap?

He hesitated. The space-ship was coming up fine, but he was scared that the cables might break at any moment. Their tensile strength must be strained to the full, he knew. If he stopped the operation now, let the ship just hang, the cables might go. And that wouldn't do the ship any good at all, from its present height.

Sparks and the mate were awaiting his orders, while continuing to obey his last. He decided to go on with it, as fast as they dared, try to get the ship standing, balanced and free, before the strange monster tank got here.

After all, if it were an enemy, surely the white circle tanks would have opened fire by now?

Seventy-nine degrees, eighty, eighty-one—Nearly there.

THE war chariot had been going at top speed all the time, and George could do nothing to make it go faster.

He and Mara danced about on the platform, waving their arms, signalling frantically. Quite uselessly, as he knew. They were still too far away. If visible at all, they were specks.

They were losing the race against the degrees. It was futile to worry, fear, or hope. It was just a matter of relative speeds, of perspectives, of cold mathematics. All determined, and they couldn't change a thing. And by his calculation it was plain, graphically plain, that they'd come just too late.

Eighty-five degrees, eighty-six—

In a few moments, those innocent-seeming, friendly tanks grouped so closely about the ship would spring to life, turn and rend it. George might get there in time to use the great chariot to scatter them, bowl them over, but by then the worst would have happened.

One could straighten battered fins, but never repair the havoc a salvo of shells at point-blank range would inevitably cause to the ship. There was no escaping it. They were on the point of being marooned on foodless Venus, with the impregnable and almost omnipotent Senilde hunting them down. . .

THE Captain glared briefly at the approaching monster, resenting its irruption at such a crucial period. Was that something moving on its roof? Two moving specks? People? Robots? No, surely just an illusion of the poor, hazy light.

If it were not, then whoever they were, they weren't going to stop him now. He'd failed too often, and he wasn't going to fail this time.

Eighty-seven degrees, eighty-eight—Two to go.

Came a thin wail, very high, rushing by, and then it was gone.

The skipper's tank jerked, and was

dragged back a few feet. He slammed on the brakes as it stopped; he cursed, and stuck bis head out of the turret to investigate.

The towering space-ship had slewed round dangerously, dragging two of the tanks back witb it. Now it hung awry, delicately poised, held only by his cable and Sparks'. Tbe mate's cable dangled loosely from the ship—it had parted very close to tbe mate's tank.

Of course, thougbt Freiburg, bitterly, it had to break *now*. Another ten seconds, and it wouldn't have mattered.

Tbe mate stuck bis bead out of bis turret. He was white-faced, torn between apprehension of the great, mysterious tank lumbering towards them and fear of wbat he knew bad just missed him.

The skipper bawled irritably at him: "Tbougbt you said they'd bold, Mister!"

The mate sbook his head, disclaiming responsibility, and pointed dumbly at the ground beside bis tank. And then the skipper saw the brand-new, straight slice marking the path of a great steel wbeel.

The launching apparatus had restocked in its mysterious way fast and efficiently, and following the signalled impulses from Senilde's control room, bad volleyed its wheels in different directions. This had been one of them.

INSIDE the rocket-ship, the light was unbearably brigbt from Venus's albedo, and until the acceleration had eased off, they couldn't move to swing the glare shields in place.

Then Mara gazed through their lemon hue, wrapped in the sbeer wonder of seeing her planet as a globe. Nobody had ever told her before that it was.

It had been a hasty get-away. First, the careful lowering of the ship again by the two remaining cables. They broke simultaneously wben the bull was a few inches from the ground, but that impact did no serious damage. Then tbe rush from one white circle tank to another, disconnecting tbeir antennae, cutting them off from the power source and rendering them helpless.

Then the bitching of the great cbariot to tbe ship in their place. Its mighty strength pulled the ship erect in balf tbe time the small tanks bad taken. It was just as well, for the wbeels were beginning to sboot around the plain like a meteorite shower, and twice came within an ace of slicing a fin off.

Then, witb a roar and a rumble to anticipate and rival tbe bellowing of the space-ship's vents, the bombers came again in waves, and this time there was design and purpose in their attacks. Tbey were pattern-bombing, laying explosive carpets over the plain metbodically, acre by acre, and it was only a question of time—and not much of it—before they reacbed the sbip's position.

The ship took off in a cloud of dust and smoke tbat was not all of its own making. It pierced the grim Meknitron clouds, and then it was

free of the poisonous—in two senses—atmosphere of the planet of love.

George gazed back at the now perceptible ball, which looked as fluffy and innocuous as lamb's wool, and remarked to the skipper: "You always beefed about your luck. But when I think of that meat slicer cutting that cable like a thread at the very last moment, I can't help believing that that made you the luckiest skipper, and Senilde the unluckiest commander, in your respective businesses."

The skipper grinned—a rare event. He looked across at Mara's rapt face at her port-hole, and whispered: "On reflection, George, I think you're the luckiest guy around here."

Mara exclaimed and pointed out. They looked, and saw the slow-spreading black spots speckling and sullying that pure, dazzling surface.

They watched, visualizing the immensities of the catastrophes happening under those clouds, and what might have happened to them if they hadn't escaped.

"Senilde's really getting into his stride," commented George, presently. "Now he's managed to dig the atomic bombs out of their lockers. . . It must be hell there. I'd like to come back sometime—but not too soon—just to see what those two immortals have contrived to do to the planet and to themselves. And which of them—if either—comes out on top. What do you think, Skip?"

"I think," said Captain Jonah Freiburg, deliberately, "that when I get back to my armchair and slippers, nothing on Earth—or Venus—is going to persuade me to leave them again. Ever. Perhaps you'll feel the same, George, when you're married."

"Perhaps," said George. "We shall soon see."

He drifted over to Mara's side.

THE END

The Night The General Left Us

By Robert Moore Williams

Brader loved machines—any machines—and they seemed to return his love. Sounds crazy? Just ask anyone at Experimental Station X what happened when General Hawkins ordered Brader to stick to mathematics and leave the machines alone.

FIRST of all, you must understand that in telling this story at all I have to be very discreet. Frankly, I am violating military security in even whispering about some of these things. The story badly needs telling, but since I have little taste for spending the rest of my life in Leavenworth or looking at a firing squad at dawn, you must forgive me if I am deliberately hazy about some of the details.

There is another reason why I have to be a little hazy: *some of the things I saw happen violate the laws of nature as we know them.* It is understandably a little difficult to report accurately things which you have seen happen *but which could not happen.* When the order of nature is upset, everybody tends to become a little confused.

The events in this story took place at what I shall call Experimental Station X. That's not quite as awe-inspiring a name as the Manhattan Project once was, but in many ways the work we are doing here contains the possibility of producing results even more globe-shaking in their final outcome than the big blow-up that came out of the Manhattan Project. True, we don't have unlimited billions of dollars to spend without accounting for them, but we have enough money for our purposes

and our laboratories and workshops sprawl over a good many acres of ground. We are under strict military discipline and more than our fair share of generals come our way, nosing around to see what progress we are making.

The world's top scientists don't come our way.

We've already got them here with us.

Generally, a lieutenant general is in charge of us, which seems to mean something important to the military mind, but usually means little or nothing to us except that we have to waste time and energy in squelching our throttling impulses. It's not considered a fair roll of the dice to throttle a general, we understand, even when you have good and just cause. At least, we think the military would have taken a dim view of us if we had throttled General Hawkins.

Illustration by Bill Terry

General Hawkins with his efforts to regiment the scientific mind was a pestiferous nuisance to all of us until Richard Balder arrived. In a way that none of us could have anticipated and most of us do not choose to remember, I guess Balder paid off the general for all of us.

From the very first day that he appeared on the project and was assigned on the basis of his record to the mathematical section, Balder was—different. He was a little guy, about half-pint size, with a bristling handlebar mustache that made him look like a Sicilian bandit who was ready to fight at a moment's notice. The truth was, Balder didn't have a meaning for the word "fight."

When he first reported to the section, and Vigil, our chief, was introducing him around as a mathematician, our first thought was that some dunderhead up on the higher levels of assignment had made a mistake and had sent us a screwball who couldn't even do simple arithmetic. Vigil set us straight on that. "Balder has published half a dozen abstruse mathematical developments of the equations governing electro-magnetic fields. If anybody besides him understood the equations we'd probably be ranking him right along with Einstein. I don't want any of you donkies taking liberties with him just because he looks like a chimpanzee who has managed to grow a mustache."

Vigil kind of grinned as he spoke. A tall, lanky, eternally good-natured man, Vigil was our boss. General Hawkins headed the whole project and gave us our orders, but Vigil told us what to do, except, sometimes, when we were telling him what to do. Hawkins may have been appointed as our leader but we had elected Vigil for the job. Vigil took some of the curse off Balder right from the start.

Nobody would have taken all of the curse off of him because he was too busy all the time putting it back on. Talk about the absent-minded professor, he was it. He didn't know what day it was, or what week. Half the time I think he didn't know the year or the century. Four times in a single morning I've had him ask me what day it was.

After a while you get tired of saying, "Tuesday, November 6, 1963," and likely as not you answer, "Sunday, April 5, 1864."

The first time I gave him that Sunday, April 5, 1864, answer, I wished to hell I had kept my mouth shut.

"Thanks, Bill, thanks a lot," he said. He went trotting back to his desk where he was fretting his way through hen scratches and Egyptian hieroglyphics that he called algebraic symbols.

He hadn't understood I was kidding him. He had accepted without question the date I had given him. Dumfounded, I stared after him. "I wonder what he would have done if I had told him it was 1492 and Columbus was just landing!" I muttered.

A couple of days later, I gave him

that answer.

He accepted it without question. After that I always gave him the right date. You don't kid a man who doesn't know he's living in the Twentieth Century.

We had a lot of trouble keeping him at his desk and at work. He would usually report for work on time and spend an hour or so messing around with the hen tracks that he called equations, then he would take off in the direction of the nearest machine that was available.

Machines fascinated him. Any kind of a machine. I watched him spend a rapt hour examining a coffee grinder in my wife's kitchen. He should have been out in the living room getting drunk with the rest of us but instead he spent his time in the kitchen taking the coffee grinder apart and putting it together again. People around the project took to hiding all their mechanical gadgets before they asked Balder to visit them.

I watched a captain's wife have polite heart failure as Balder took apart an antique clock that had once belonged to her great-great-grandmother. The clock hadn't run for years, it wasn't supposed to run but just to sit on the mantel and look impressive.

Balder took it apart and put it together again. After he had succeeded in disentangling the ends of his mustache from the works — they got caught in the main spring as he put it back together again—the clock ran. The captain's wife forgave him for the heart failure she had almost had and went for weeks in a glow because the clock was running.

Balder and machines, any kind of machines, were *simpatico*. He loved them. Right down to the last nut and bolt in them, he loved them. I think they knew it. I think they loved him too.

Brrrr! When I look over that last sentence, I wonder what the hell I am saying. If the project medicos saw that, they would have me up for a psycho examination for sure.

To hell with the medicos! They won't see it. So I'm going to say it again. Balder loved machines, he loved any and every kind of machine. They knew it and they loved him in return.

They ran for him. No matter how badly they were out of order, they get themselves into high gear just as soon as he started tinkering with them. He could have made a comfortable living fixing clocks alone.

The story Joe Woolston told about him was pure fantasy, of course. Woolston is in charge of the computing section, he has an electromechanical brain working for him that takes up half a city block. This fancy computor is always getting out of order and Woolston is always swearing bitterly at it and driving half a dozen technicians frantic as they try to keep it in running order. Of course, Balder discovered the computor—I will almost swear he could *smell* a machine that wasn't working right—and the "brain" was sulking that morning and Woolston was swearing himself into a frenzy

as he tried to discover what particular electronic gadget had gone wrong this time.

Balder, grinning like a chimpanzee suddenly discovering a new coconut grove, strolled down the banks of the machine.

"This relay is not functioning," he said.

Woolston, examining the relay, discovered that Balder was right. Profanely he replaced the relay. The computor worked again and Balder spent most of the day happily examining it, the "brain" working perfectly all the time he was there.

The instant he left the building, the computor stopped.

Woolston swears it happened. Nobody doubts him, but all of us contend that there was no connection between Balder's departure and the stopping of the machine, that this was a coincidence.

"Then why in the hell did the damned thing start working again just as soon as I called him back into the building?" Woolston screamed at us when he told the story.

"It was a coincidence—"

"You and your coincidences give me a great pain in the hind end!" Woolston yelled.

Soon after that, Balder discovered the development section, where hard-working men under Chief Kirken were trying to translate our mathematical fantasies into force and metal realities. In other words, the development section was the place where they tried to build the machines that we dreamed up. As soon as Balder discovered the development section, we practically lost him. Here men were *building* machines, designing machines, creating machines. This was the place for Balder and he knew it.

The development section and this whole project are heavily on the hush-hush side, though I have never been able to figure out the exact reason for all the top-priority secrecy. True, there might be a reason in attempting to keep the Russos from finding out what we are doing, but that's not a very good reason. The Reds could discover what we're doing by just buying a batch of comic books and using their noodles. Our big secret project is old stuff to the younger set.

"Space satellite! Haw!" I can hear derisive belly laughter echoing all the way from Portland, Maine, to San Diego, California, when I mention it. "Haw! Old stuff!"

It seems odd to me that adults can get sent to prison for revealing what every alert teen ager knows.

The fact that we are trying to produce in reality—in cold metal and super-hot force—something that up until we get the job finished is only a series of pictures in comic books may make some difference too.

And our project *is* important. If we could get the job done, if we could produce a working space station capable of circling this planet, our work has automatically become one of the most important tasks ever attempted. The building of the pyramids in

Egypt so long ago, the first atom bomb, and almost anything else you care to mention, all took a back seat to us, if we could do the job.

To a larger degree than any military expert will usually admit in public, military control of the whole planet depends on the launching of a space station. The hordes that marched under Genghis Khan, the greenclad troops that fought under the Kaiser, Caesar's legions, the bully boys of the Third Reich, the drooling hordes of Russia—if you put all these together into one army, you would still not have a military force strong enough to control the planet. But what you could not do with thirty million men—presuming you could pull thirty million men away from production and still provide them with food and arms—you could do with a few space stations.

When the first space station goes into the sky, and stays there, we automatically have one world. There will still be quarrels and disagreements—as long as the human animal has claws and fangs he is going to try to scratch and bite his neighbor—but the frightful armed holocausts called wars will cease to exist.

It is this dream rather than the salaries that are paid us that keeps most of us on the job at Experimental Station X. We're dreamers, idealists, and we dream of a world without war.

Which is another reason we are slowly going nuts down here. We have seen that super space station. We know it can be built. . . . But I am getting ahead of my story.

BALDER, damn him! Or damn somebody, though maybe the right person isn't Balder.

About the third day after Balder discovered the development section a request came through from Kirken to Vigil for Balder's transfer to that department. The little monkey had engineered the transfer request himself, of course. Vigil called him in. Vigil didn't want to lose Balder but he didn't want to keep him in the mathematical section if the little scientist didn't really want to be here. Vigil has plenty on the ball, he puts a man where the man wants to be. After a conference, Vigil approved the transfer and sent it on up to headquarters for final approval.

We're very military in some ways down here. All transfers have to go through channels and be approved by the right people. Which meant that General Hawkins had to pass on the request. For a couple of days, while the general was getting to it, Balder went around with a moon grin on his chimpanzee face, his handlebar mustache elevated so high the ends of it practically touched his ears. Then General Hawkins was on the phone, screaming at Vigil.

"What the hell's the meaning of this request for a transfer to the development section, Vigil? This man Balder is a mathematician, isn't he?"

"He seems to have several abilities, sir. Chief Kirken and I thought his talents might be utilized to the best advantage in the development

section."

"I don't give a damn how many different abilities he has. We hired him as a mathematician. Our records show he is a professor of higher mathematics—"

"But he has several very important hobbies, sir—"

"Hobbies, hell! Do you think we're running a hobby haven down here? He's a mathematician and he stays in the mathematical section. That's final."

Bang! went the phone back on its cradle.

Balder happened to be in the chief's office when the call came through. Vigil said his face dropped a foot. But he reached a decision instantly. "General Hawkins just doesn't understand about this transfer," he said. "I'll drop in at his office and explain it to him." Vigil tried to explain to him that penetrating the understanding of the general wasn't exactly easy but Balder wouldn't listen. He went out of the mathematical section with the general air of a man going out to buy a fifth of bourbon, in a sort of pleased and eager anticipation.

Half an hour later, the MP sergeant that we called the Gorilla and an MP buck private brought him back. They came stalking into the mathematical section with Balder, his hat crammed down over his forehead, an outraged and infuriated chimpanzee walking between them. They went straight to Vigil's office.

"General Hawkins' personal orders," the Gorilla said. "In the future, this man is not to be given permission to visit headquarters."

"What—what happened?" the astonished Vigil asked.

The Gorilla shrugged. "All I know is what the general told me, to bring him here. The general also said that if he showed around headquarters again, we was to throw him into the guardhouse without waiting to ask why." The Gorilla grinned. He liked this. He wheeled out of the office, the buck MP following behind him.

"The most unreasonable, impossible, discourteous, stupid, blockheaded human being who ever lived on the face of this earth!" Balder screamed, referring to General Hawkins. "That is, if he is human."

Vigil soothed and consoled him and eventually got him calmed down. For the next two days he stayed at his desk and sulked.

As he sulked, he was very busy figuring. All of us held our breath, thinking that the jolt he had received from the general had jarred him into doing some effective work. Then I made it my business to discover what he was doing.

He was drawing pictures of different ways to execute people. He had drawn a gallows and a firing squad and a gas chamber and a stake with fire around it and a beheading block and an atom bomb explosion. And others. In every one of these execution scenes, General Hawkins played a prominent part. The general was hung, stabbed, shot, dismembered, beheaded, drowned,

burned, blown up in an atomic explosion, and what have you?

I don't know what the psychos would have made of Balder's pictures—probably plenty—but I rather liked them. If he had asked me, I could have added one or two ways of my own to take care of the general, such as having him swallowed by a boa constrictor.

At the end of the second day, Balder destroyed all his pictures and was again his old sweet reliable self—meaning that we could rely on him to spend an hour or so at his desk every day if some mechanical gadget didn't distract him on the way to work. Again he spent most of his time in the development section. Officially, he couldn't work there, but unofficially he could spend most of his time there.

He returned to us abruptly, one day, from the development section, in charge of the same two MPs. This time General Hawkins came with them. The general was not happy.

"Vigil, by God, this man is a mathematician, he is assigned to the mathematical section, and by God, I want him working here. Here! Do you understand?" The general banged his fist on Vigil's desk. "If I catch him in the development section again, I'll have both of you tried by a general court martial. You may be a civilian, Vigil, and so may Balder, but both of you are subject to military rule and military discipline."

Breathing fire and brimstone and waving his forked tail in the air, the general stalked out of the section.

"The man's a fool," Balder said. Luckily, the general was already out of hearing or all of us would probably have been court martialed.

After that, Balder spent at least part of each day in the mathematical section, patiently working. I don't know where he spent his nights, but later I guessed.

Then something seemed to light a fire under him. For days on end, he labored at his desk, not even taking time to eat. Woolston sent up a note saying the big computor was out of order and would Balder come and help him fix it. Balder didn't answer. Woolston came himself. Balder, with hardly a grunt, threw him out.

"Fix your damned adding machine yourself, I'm busy," he said to Woolston.

Woolston was white-faced when he went away. It was bad enough to be rejected but to have somebody call your beloved electronic computor, which covers a city block, an adding machine, must have been bitter gall indeed.

After that, we went around on tiptoe. I checked to see what Balder was doing. He was covering page after page with the hen tracks that he called equations, which meant he was up to something. The question was—what? Later he stopped by my desk. "Bill, will you help me do something tonight?"

"Sure. What is it?"

"It's a secret, Bill. I can't tell you right now." His face was glowing.

I might have guessed the answer. That night when he came by for me, we headed straight for the rounded domes and hangers of the development section. "Isn't this place Off Limits for you?" I asked him.

"No place is Off Limits for me," he answered.

We went in a side door of one of the domes. It was locked but, of course, Balder had a key. Kirken and a couple of technicians were waiting for us inside. They gave me the old fish eye, apparently fearing I was a spy for General Hawkins, but Balder vouched for me.

"Gentlemen, I have solved our problem," the little scientist stated.

That got a stir out of them. Kirken, a grizzled man with a wary expression on his face as if he was constantly prepared to dodge a hot jet somewhere behind him, positively beamed at Balder's words.

Acting like a bunch of conspirators, we cautiously turned on the lights in the dome. The windows had been carefully blacked out so that no ray of light could escape. As soon as I got into the place, I knew where Balder had been spending his nights, and probably Kirken and his two technicians also. They had been building the object which rested on the testing platform in the middle of the dome.

About fifteen feet long, it was cigar shaped.

It looked like a model of a space ship.

A model space ship was a common enough object here. The purpose of the development section was to test every new idea that came along, and if it looked promising, to make a model of it. Usually their models were wooden mock-ups but occasionally they built full-scale models with the result that the place often looked like a top shop just before Christmas. Only these were working models, not toys.

"The error was here." Balder said. He gestured toward the model. "There was also an error here." His hand waved toward a control panel on a platform beside the sloping wall. "The controls were not quite right. They were not completely in tune with the ship, they were not *simpatico* with it." He burst into a string of excited words to explain what he meant.

I didn't understand the words—you can't get anything like adequate understanding into words—but Kirken and his two technicians understood enough to follow Balder's directions. While my job was pretty much to fetch and carry—the strong back and the weak mind angle—I soon got the gist of what they were doing.

The model was radio controlled. This, I presumed, was just for test purposes.

Balder was as busy as a monkey on forty feet of grapevine changing the controls on the panel at the side of the dome. He was really sent. There was a glow on his face and every word he spoke seemed to bubble out of him. At the time, I didn't think much of this but later I won-

dered what part his excitement played in what happened.

We must have worked a couple of hours changing things around. All during this time I could feel the excitement growing in us. It found expression in odd ways. Kirken's voice became more shrill. One of the technicians began to sweat on his upper lip. The hands of the other one began to shake.

Me, I was calm. All I did was try to light two cigarettes at once.

Balder was in a golden glow. Actually the man seemed to be radiating a current of some kind. The rest of us seemed to be receiving it until we vibrated in tune with him.

"Warm up the model, we're ready for the test," he sang out at last.

For the first time, I got a good look inside the model. It was made with all the precision of a fine watch —fuel tanks, driving jets, and some other kind of a propulsion mechanism which puzzled me and apparently puzzled the technicians also.

"That's one of Balder's ideas," one of the technicians explained to me. "I don't pretend to understand it and I doubt if he does either."

"Stand aside, we're casting off!" Balder yelled. He was like a kid turned loose for vacation. As the technicians hastily stepped aside, his fingers moved over the control panel.

The jets blasted fire, the model surged forward, rose into the air, and circled the dome, under perfect control. One look at it and I knew it was not operating under jet power exclusively. No jet ship could fly so slowly and control so smoothly as this one. Whatever Balder's special gadget's were, they were wonderful.

I held my breath as I watched it circle the dome. Kirken looked like a man who is seeing a dream come true. The technician with the sweat on his upper lip stood with his mouth open, staring. The one whose hands had trembled so much pitched forward on his face in a faint.

Balder, like a grinning ape who has turned into a god, stood looking upward.

He had something to grin about. This was it! This was what we had been working, slaving, and praying for.

This was the model of our space station, the one that would circle the planet forever, using no power. This was the gadget that would have aroused a derisive "Haw!" from Portland to San Diego, because it was old stuff.

The idea *was* old. But the fact, the working model, the reality, made up a new page in the history of Earth. Because of this model gliding gracefully around the dome in response to Balder's radio controls, a whole new history might be written. Maybe in some far future they would date all history from this moment.

Because of what was happening here, a new Earth came into being. It would take time but from this moment on, the old national boundaries went out of existence. Wars went out of existence. One world came into being.

The new world wouldn't be a new Eden, it wouldn't be Paradise, it wouldn't be the Happy Isles, but it would be a better world than the one we knew. It would be a world where the billions of dollars now flowing into armaments could flow into productive pursuits, into irrigating the deserts, producing more and better food, more and better homes, fighting disease, into a thousand ways for making human life a little richer, more secure, and more beautiful.

This was our moment. This was history.

For maybe five minutes we stood there, looking like the first bunch of apes venturing out of the forests into the strange, treeless plains where destiny was waiting for them, awed and bewildered, knowing that we were seeing history in the making as we watched the model swoop in lazy circles through the air overhead. In that swift, sure movement, we saw that it was more than a space station, it was a radio controlled weapon that could blow cities off the map ten thousand miles from its launching point. If a huge space station were built, and armed with models such as this, each one equipped with an atom bomb warhead, the sky and the earth under it could be controlled.

"What's going on here?" The sound of this voice jarred me out of my trance and raised hackles of hair at the back of my neck. I spun around. General Hawkins, with the Gorilla and another MP, stood there. Apparently the general had been making an inspection and had either glimpsed a stray gleam of light seeping out of the blacked-out dome or he had heard Balder's excited yell when the model was ready for testing. Of course, his pet MPs carried duplicate keys to all installations, so he had come right on in.

Kirken looked like a man whose hair was about to turn white in a single night. Even Balder was nonplussed for a moment. He stepped away from the control panel and moved toward the general.

"I thought I had forbidden you to enter the development section," Hawkins said, in a voice that might have been useful for calling hogs.

"But this is after duty hours," Balder said.

"I don't give a damn when it is."

"But we have made an important discovery."

Twice Balder made the mistake of forgetting to say "sir." Hawkins practically went through the roof. "I don't give a good goddamn what kind of a discovery you have made. My orders have been disobeyed." Dramatically he pointed a finger at Balder. "Arrest that man!"

As the Gorilla moved forward toward Balder, I caught a glimpse of the model. It seemed to have gone out of control and was diving straight down toward the diminutive scientist.

"Look out!" I yelled.

Balder turned his head and saw the model. He flung up a hand.

Like a trained dog obeying a signal from its master, the model, which had been diving straight at him,

zoomed up and over his head.

Simultaneously the Gorilla yanked his club from his belt and cracked Balder on the head with it.

The sergeant swore later that when Balder threw up his hand, he thought the scientist was going to hit him. Since Balder didn't have a weapon in his hand, and couldn't have damaged the two-hundred pounds of bone and beef that made up the sergeant with anything less than a submachine gun, the MP's story didn't wash.

Balder went down. He wasn't knocked out but he was stunned. Slowly he dragged himself to one knee. The only sound in the dome was the hum of the model circling overhead.

Hawkins stood grinning at Balder as the little scientist pulled himself up. The general was enjoying this sight. He approved thoroughly of what his sergeant had done. From the expression on his face, I got the idea that the only thing the general regretted was that he hadn't been the lucky one to strike the blow. He would have liked it better that way.

I guess that was one of the penalties Hawkins paid for being a general. He didn't get to do his own dirty work. But he could do a fair job of enjoying watching it even if he didn't get to do it himself.

"You dirty dog—" Balder said. He whispered the words but Hawkins heard them clearly enough.

The general's face lost its expression of happy enjoyment. It turned red. He lifted his hand to point at Balder, paused, perplexed.

The scientist seemed to have forgotten all about Hawkins. Balder was looking up toward the ceiling, searching for his model. It was moving downward again in a swooping dive.

Balder flung up his hand and pointed toward the general.

"Take him!" he screamed.

He sounded as if he was giving orders to a trained police dog.

For an instant, the general looked startled. Then he laughed nastily. "Now you're out of your head—"

Diving straight at him, the model zoomed downward.

The general threw himself flat on the floor.

The model whistled over his head. Instead of crashing it zoomed in a sharp upward loop. Balder, resting on one knee, kept his eyes focused on it with a fierce intensity the like of which I have never seen on this earth. His lips moved but if he spoke, the words were in a whisper. His body swayed. He seemed to follow the model, to move with it.

"What the hell?" the general yelled. "Turn that damned thing off."

Kirken moved swiftly to obey him. He cut the power input to the control panel.

"That'll take care of it, sir."

"Like hell it will!" Balder screamed. *"Take him!"*

While all of us held our gaping breaths, the model dived again at the general.

This I saw with my own eyes.

Even with the control panel out of operation, the model obeyed Balder. Don't ask me how this happened. I know it was impossible. The only possible rational explanation I can offer is that the model dived accidentally toward the general, either that or I was hallucinating. But if I was hallucinating, several other men were in the same condition, including General Hawkins. He saw the model coming straight down at him. He had dodged it once before but this time the yellow must have come up in his throat.

Turning, he fled out the open door behind him.

As if it had eyes, the model followed him.

Outside in the night there was a scream and a heavy boom that ended the scream. A flash of light lit up the sky and the ground shook.

Balder, a look of satisfaction on his face, sighed and settled himself down on one arm for all the world like a tired little boy deciding it was time to take a nap.

When we got outside and got the lights going we found a hole ten feet deep and twenty feet across. We didn't find General Hawkins. The general had left us and not enough of him remained to find.

SPECIAL orders carried it as death in line of duty and the citation that came along indicated that General Hawkins had died a hero's death in testing a new experimental model aircraft.

That is as it may be. General Hawkins died. That much I know. The model exploded as it struck him. That much we have all guessed. There was enough fuel in it to make the explosion possible so the source of the power is not hard to get at.

But the gist, the essence, the utterly incomprehensible part of the whole affair was the fact that *the model obeyed Balder even after the radic controls had been cut off.*

We checked that angle. We checked it plenty. The radio controls were off.

But the model had continued obeying Balder. He had sent it after the general and it had obeyed his orders.

How? Don't ask me. The man was *simpatico* with machines. That's an answer even though it doesn't explain much. He loved them and they loved him. Perhaps there is some unknown higher medium, some unguessable, impossible ether, through which the mind of a man and the controls of a machine may be in tune. I don't know about that, but if such an ether exists, then Balder and the model were operating in it that night the general left us.

Balder himself? That's the next thing that none of us understand. Remember, the MP had clubbed him. The Gorilla, I understand, is now doing duty with the Hairy Ainu in North Japan. But he had hit Balder. When we got around to remembering the little scientist, we found he was unconscious. We got him to the hospital PDQ. They said he had had a mild concussion, and

it must have been mild, for he was up and about the next day.

There was only one thing wrong with him. He couldn't remember the equations he had developed or how he had changed the model. The changes in the control panel could be traced out, but they didn't help us without the model.

He still can't remember. He knows he did it, once, he saw the model work, he knows that it was built, but the secret of the gadgets he had put into it and how to build it over again were knocked out of his brain by a single lick from a wooden club. There may be a moral of a sort here, the cave man with the club being stronger and more enduring than the brilliant scientist, but I don't want to think about it.

Now Balder sits at his desk all day long, a woe-begone expression on his face. He wastes ream after ream of paper trying to re-create what once he created in a golden glow of inspiration.

Meanwhile he and the rest of us here go slowly crazy as we wait for him to duplicate the brain storm he once had.

The thing that is driving us mad is the knowledge that a space station, space ships, and weapons under perfect radio control, can be built. We've seen it done. We know it can be done. But the secret of how to do it is locked up in some damaged neural connection in the foggy mind of a bewildered little scientist who looks like a chimpanzee.

Someday that neural connection will come loose and he will have his secret again. When he does, the world as we dream of it, the world as it may and must be at some time in the future, will come into being.

And we at Experimental Station X will come back to life.

THE END

Lost Continents

By L. Sprague de Camp

No. 5

The MAYAN MYSTERIES*

. . . hieroglyphics old
Which sages and keen-eyed astrologers
Then living on the earth, with labouring thought
Won from the gaze of many centuries:
Now lost, save what we find on remnants huge
Of stone, or marble swart; their import gone,
Their wisdom long since fled.

Keats

WHEN the Spaniards arrived in the Americas in the early sixteenth century, they found several well-developed civilizations. Of these the most advanced, at least in some ways, were the Mayas of Yucatán, who ever since have played a large rôle in Atlantism. For one thing, the Mayas alone of the New-World indigenes had a real system of writing, though the Aztecs of Mexico had a more primitive system of picture-writing like cartoons without words, and the peoples of the Inca Empire of Peru possessed the *quipu*, a device of knotted cords to help people remember things.

After the disappearance of Landa's treatise on the Mayas, these people dropped out of the consciousness of Europeans for about two centuries, partly because of the inaccessibility of their harborless country and partly because the conquest of the Aztecs by Hernán Cortés was better publicized. Many Aztec picture-manuscripts survived the missionaries' book-burnings, and historians like the hispanified Aztec, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl (pronounced "eesh-tleel-*shaw*-cheetl") wrote treatises in Spanish on Aztec culture and history. Most of these last, however, were buried in Spanish archives in the form of unpublished manuscripts. There were also a few little-known descriptions in Spanish of the Mayan ruins at Palenque. Altogether the Middle American civilizations were

*Slightly condensed from *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science, & Literature*, by L. Sprague de Camp; Phila.: Prime Press, 1952; copr. 1952 by L. Sprague de Camp.

so thoroughly forgotten that the eighteenth-century Scottish historian Robertson denied that any New-World people was ever "entitled to rank with those nations which merit the name of civilized," and insisted that *conquistadores* who wrote of Indian cities and palaces must have been romancing.

In the history of any branch of science you will often find that at the beginning an enthusiastic Frenchman performs strenuous if amateurish work and publishes theories which, though wildly wrong, interest more sober students who lay the groundwork for the real science. Du Chaillu performed this office for Viking history, and likewise the rediscovery of the Mayas was begun by that singular character Jean Frédéric, Count de Waldeck (1766–1875): soldier, artist, explorer, courtier, revolutionist, and archeologist.

Waldeck commenced his adventures when at the age of nineteen he went with Le Vaillant's expedition into the unknown interior of Africa. Subsequently he became an adventurer in the French Revolution, and later a soldier and a naval officer under Napoleon. Then he took an active part in Spanish and Latin-American revolutions. In 1821 his imagination was fired by the sight of Mayan ruins in Guatemala, and on his return to London he illustrated the first modern book on the Mayas.

The book came to the attention of Lord Kingsborough, he of the Jewish-Indian theory, who sent Waldeck back to Central America with a job as mining engineer and a commission to draw American antiquities and seek traces of the Lost Ten Tribes. Although Waldeck, in his sixties, had already had enough adventures for three men, he was not slowed up yet.

During the next decade he scrambled over jungle-matted ruins, drawing them as he thought they should have looked. His beautiful drawings, alas, were "a strange mixture of inaccuracy, unjustified restoration, over-drawing, and exaggeration." Not satisfied with inserting his young Mexican mistress *sans* clothes into many of the pictures, he put things in them that were never there at all, such as four statues of men in Phoenician-style headdress holding up the front of the Temple of the Magicians at Uxmal.

Although Waldeck's fairy godmother had neglected to give him a sense of critical accuracy along with his other gifts, nevertheless his first book, *Voyage pittoresque et archéologique dans la province de Yucatan* (1838) won him a medal and a pension from the French government. He went on to marry, at eighty-four, a seventeen-year-old girl by whom he had a son, to publish his second book at 100, and finally to drop dead at 109 just after turning to look at a pretty girl on the boulevards of Paris.

While Waldeck's books proved of little permanent value, a copy of the *Voyage pittoresque* interested John Lloyd Stephens, a successful American lawyer and globe-trotter who had already travelled extensively in Europe and the Near East. The ebullient

Stephens arranged to get himself a diplomatic mission to Central America, and departed with his friend Frederick Catherwood to explore. Catherwood, an English artist, had already travelled about Muslim countries in Turkish dress drawing the antiquities of Egypt and the Holy Land, and at this time in 1839, was the proprietor of a set of panoramas of the Holy Land in New York City, which he had painted from the drawings made in his travels.

This pair made two exploring-trips to the Mayan cities, and collaborated on two books, *Incidents of Travel in Central America* and *Incidents of Travel in Yucatán,* the real pioneer works in Mayology. At that time, when learned circles were still speculating about an Egyptian, Hebrew, Roman, Norse, Chinese, or other Old-World origin for the Amerindian civilizations, Stephens caused something of a stir by proclaiming that the Mayan cities had been built by the same brown slant-eyed people who still farmed the featureless plain of Yucatán.

Other travellers and scientists followed Stephens and Catherwood: Sir Alfred Maudslay made casts of the carvings on Mayan monuments for the Victoria and Albert Museum; Brasseur de Bourbourg unearthed the abridgment of Landa's *Relación* and tried unsuccessfully to decipher Mayan writing by means of it; Augustus Le Plongeon excavated Mayan ruins and concocted fantasies about the fall of Mu; and in the 1880's Förstemann in Germany and Goodman in California independently solved the Mayan system of numerals.

Hence during the last century a vast amount of work has been done in the Mayan civilization, so that today it is fairly well known—not so well as that of ancient Egypt, perhaps, but better than, let us say, the mysterious pre-Aryan civilizations of India.

However, there remain a number of mysteries (or pseudo-mysteries) about the Mayas. There are many things we should like to know about them but don't, and others that we do know about them but that pseudo-scientists and occultists prefer to believe we don't. For example, who were the Mayas; whence came they; what was their history; what is the secret of their writing?

Nearly every member of the Atlantist cult has propounded answers, sometimes very remarkable answers indeed, to these questions. For instance a decade ago R. B. Stacey-Judd published a huge book, *Atlantis, Mother of Empires,* with lavish illustration and a fabulously expensive format, devoted largely to idealizing the Mayas, exaggerating their accomplishments, and whitewashing their sins. He denied with partisan warmth that this noble people, at least under the Old Empire, could have practiced war and human sacrifice. Unhappily, recent discoveries prove beyond doubt that the Old Empire Mayas did engage with zest in both these practices.

What are the facts about the Mayas?

WHEN you want to learn about a people, the first logical step is to look at them. The Mayas are a short, strongly-built people with small hands and feet, very broad heads, prominent cheek-bones, and straight coarse black hair, very sparse on the face and body. They often display the bluish "Mongolian spot" at the base of children's spines and the "epicanthic fold" that gives a slant-eyed look. Like many Mexican Indians they have a tendency to retreating chins and foreheads; in pre-Columbian days they accentuated the latter tendency by binding their children's heads.

They also wore jade plugs in their ears, were tattooed all over with green ink, and painted themselves red and black, so that altogether the Spaniards thought them the ugliest little men they had ever seen. No doubt the Mayas thought the Spaniards terrible-looking too. Visitors to their country have described them as friendly, good-natured, honest, industrious, stoical towards pain and hardship, and as intelligent as most people.

Evidently the Mayas are physically one more Amerind tribe, belonging to the Mongoloid or Yellow Race, though like many Amerinds they run to darker skins and bigger noses than such Old-World Mongoloids as the Chinese. Although Spence calls the Mayas the "American Crô-Magnons," they are as different in body from the towering, jut-jawed Crô-Magnons as any men could be. Nor is there any reason to trace their prominent convex noses back to the Armenoid racial type of the Near East, as Hooton and Gladwin have tried to do, for equally aquiline noses are common among many Amerinds like the Blackfeet, and Armenoid ancestry would probably have brought with it other Armenoid characteristics like the vast curly beards you see on Babylonian statues.

The next step is to listen. The Maya language, or rather family of languages, occupies a large area in Yucatán and neighboring regions, interspersed with Spanish and non-Mayan Indian languages. The Maya family comprises a group of typical Amerind tongues, showing, however, only the faintest resemblances to the other native languages of Middle America, and (Le Plongeon to the contrary notwithstanding) none at all to any other languages on earth. Mayan is simple and regular in its inflections, with a tendency (like English) towards monosyllables and homophones. Although it may have changed quite a bit since Columbus, this vital tongue is still the prevailing language of Yucatán, with its own books and newspapers.

When we speak of the Mayan culture of civilization we really mean two cultures: the so-called Old Empire in Guatemala, and the New Empire in Yucatán. The term "Empire" is misleading in this connection, since nowhere in Middle America was there anything, so far as we know, like the strong centralized governments implied by the term "Empire."

Cortés's opponent, the Aztec "Emperor" Montezuma II, was not a heredity despot of the European type, but an elected tribal chief, of limited powers, whose people had established a precarious ascendancy over some of their neighbors.

The Old Empire (whatever we choose to call it) arose some time between 400 and 100 B.C. and flourished for a thousand years, as we know from the dates on Mayan monuments. Between 700 and 1000 A.D. the Mayas of Guatemala ceased erecting monuments, and most Mayologists believe that they abandoned their cities at that time, though a few think they continued to dwell in them.

Many causes have been suggested for this presumed abandonment: earthquakes, pestilence, climatic changes, war, and social decadence. Perhaps the most convincing explanation is that of Morley and some others: that the Mayan agricultural system contained the seeds of its own downfall.

The Mayas have always farmed by cutting and burning a few acres of jungle at a time to plant their maize with a dibble or pointed stick. While this system produces an easy living for a few years, the yield then drops off sharply, forcing the farmer to slash and burn a new patch. The old patch, instead of reverting at once to jungle, is covered by tough grasses with which the Mayas, lacking plows, draft-animals, or even digging-tools, could not cope.

In time they thus converted the neighborhoods of their cities into great grassy plains, until each farmer had to go so far to reach his plot that life near the city was no longer practical for him. Eventually the jungle returns and the cycle begins again, but meantime the Old Empire Mayas, perhaps egged on by priests convinced that they had offended the gods, migrated north and built a whole new constellation of cities in Yucatán. This New Empire, as it is called, was still a going concern when the Spaniards arrived in 1511.

The Old Empire was peculiar in being a purely Neolithic civilization, no trace of metals having been found in its ruins save those dating from the end of the period. Its rise cannot be dated definitely, since civilizations don't spring into being in a single day. However, the oldest Mayan date that most experts agree upon is that of the monument called Stela 9 at Uaxactún (pronounced "wah-shock-*toon*"). According to the most generally accepted system of correlation of Mayan dates, the date on this object corresponds to 328 A.D. Apparently earlier dates exist, like those of the Leyden Plate (320 A.D.), the Tuxtla Statuette (162 A.D. pronounced "*toosh*-tlah"), and the La Venta Stone (31 B.C.) but there is some question as to whether these dates count from the same base date as the later Mayan dates.

Anyway, the Old Empire certainly does not go back many thousands of years B.C., as Atlantists have claimed, even though the Mayas probably carved their dates in wood

for some centuries before they took to chiseling them laboriously in stone. Although similar speculations have been voiced about the cliff-dwellings of Arizona, studies of the tree-rings of the timbers used in these structures shows that they were built, not 10,000 or 20,000 B.C., but well after the beginning of the Christian Era, when the Mayan civilization had already arisen and Egypt was thousands of years old.

As to the culture attained by the Mayas, they can best be compared to the Egyptians of about the First Dynasty, before the pyramid-builders. While it is easy to exaggerate the Mayas' accomplishments, they did pretty well considering that their country was poor in minerals and that it lacked animals suitable for beasts of burden.

Furthermore the Old Empire did not, any more than the Egyptian civilization, spring into existence suddenly. It rose from a ruder culture sometimes called the Archaic or Middle Culture: a preliterate agriculture system, lacking writing, cities, and other appurtenances of civilization, but still rising like a plateau from the hunting and food-gathering cultures around it.

OF the other two main native American civilizations, the Andean and the Mexican, most archeologists believe the former to be about the same age (within a few centuries) as the Mayan. The Mexican civilization of the Toltecs and Aztecs is younger, beginning around the middle of the first millenium A.D., perhaps in answer to cultural influence radiating from the Mayas.

Among the less advanced cultures, the apartment-house culture of the Pueblo Indians of the U. S. Southwest is about the same age as the Mayan Old Empire, while the burial-mound cultures of the Ohio and upper Mississippi Valleys are even younger than the Mexican. The mounds were still in use when the Whites arrived; in fact some contain European trade-goods. Strictly speaking there was no race of "Mound Builders"; several tribes built mounds for a variety of reasons over several centuries. A Professor Haebler first asserted, wrongly, that the mounds must be of vast age because they must have been built by sedentary farming peoples, not realizing that the Indians of those areas *were* sedentary farmers, and thus giving rise to another fantasy about the Atlantean Mound-Builders.

Mayan art and architecture were highly original, with remarkable achievements and even more striking limitations. In the Old World, despite the existence of many civilizations, artistic methods and concepts have diffused until the art of each civilization has affected those of all the rest, so that despite regional differences the civilized art of the Old World is in a sense one. Mayan art, growing in isolation, shows no Old-World influence, which makes it hard for Westeners to grasp. Waldeck's mistakes were partly due to the fact that he could not free himself from the

prepossessions of an Old-World artist.

Mayan architecture, like that of Egypt three or four thousand years earlier, began by developing stone structures in imitation of the existing wooden houses. Mayan architects evolved a style of massive ceremonial buildings and chiefs' houses (the *polloi* continued to live in their thatched huts) with walls, of stone and concrete faced with stucco, so thick that there was little room left inside. Never having discovered the true arch, they used false arches and corbelled vaults. That is, they let each course of stone overhang the one beneath until the two sides met at the top. Finally they crowned their concrete roofs with ornamental walls called "roof-combs."

Their structures included astronomical observatories, ball-courts in which they played a kind of cross between basketball and soccer, dance-platforms, vapor-baths, shrines, reviewing-stands, stadiums, city walls, causeways, and pyramids comparable in bulk, though not in height, with those of Egypt. However, the pyramids of the Mayas and Aztecs have nothing to do with those of Egypt, which were built several thousands of years earlier and moreover evolved from tombs, while the New-World pyramids evolved from temple platforms.

The Mayas based their agriculture on maize, with a variety of subsidiary plants such as beans and pineapples. They domesticated dogs, turkeys, deer, and bees. The Amerinds in general made up for their lack of success in taming animals by a highly developed plant husbandry; they actually domesticated more species of plants than the people of the Old World. They also showed astonishing plant-breeding ability. Thus maize was so modified by breeding that scientists still disagree as to which wild grass it is derived from. The South American Indians also domesticated a variety of plants, some like oca that have never been transplanted to other parts of the world.

When the Mayan maize-culture was working properly it gave the Mayas plenty of spare time, which they put in on their great construction projects, religious ceremonials, and art-work. They even carved jade, one of the hardest stones, without metal, using reeds and strings for drilling and cutting, with sand as an abrasive and water as a lubricant. They began to use gold, silver, and copper about the time of the rise of the New Empire, at first for ornaments, though later they learned to make copper knives. Like the Aztecs, however, their priests continued to open up their victims with knives of obsidian (volcanic glass) since the gods are conservative in such matters. Copper-working may have diffused north from Peru; the Andeans at the time of the Conquest had gone beyond simple copper-hammering to casting in bronze.

On the whole, the New-World civilizations showed themselves rather backwards technologically compared with those of the Old World. As with other Amerinds, the Middle Ameri-

cans' bent was artistic and religious rather than technological or administrative. Among most Amerind peoples, for instance, the tribe relied entirely on custom to keep wrongdoers in order, lacking formal law and machinery for punishing criminals. Only a few Amerind peoples, such as the Iroquois and the Incas of Peru, displayed much talent for government.

THOSE who argue that the Mayas must have obtained their culture from elsewhere, for instance from Atlantis or Egypt, cite resemblances between the Mayan civilization and those of the Old World. Such arguments, however, concentrate upon likenesses and ignore differences, which are so profound as to make the resemblances look petty and accidental. So, now that we have discussed the things the Mayas had, let's consider those they did *not* have:

The plow. The Mayas' only agricultural implement was the dibble. Poke a hole in the ground, drop in a corn, stamp the hole shut, and you have the Mayan system of planting.

Metal tools. Except for the copper knives that came into their culture late, they were innocent of these too. They fought with stone-pointed spears (and, later, arrows) and stone-edged sword-clubs.

The wheel. Although the wheel appeared in Sumer about 3000 B.C., there is no sign of wheeled traction in the New World. Nor, according to all but one of the experts, did they have the potter's wheel. (Mercer says they did.) Some Amerinds had the spindle-whorl or flywheel (mistaken by some early investigators for the true wheel) and the Aztecs made toy animals that ran on little clay rollers wrapped around wooden axles socketed in the toys' legs. Why they never took the obvious step of developing these toys into wheeled vehicles is as great a mystery as why Old-World peoples stamped impressions with seals for thousands of years before anybody thought of the printing-press.

Old-World food-plants. In general the New and Old Worlds had no food-plants in common. Now, it is incredible that if Atlanteans had colonized both Mexico and Egypt, they should have taken wheat only to Egypt and maize only to Mexico. The few apparent exceptions to this rule do not necessarily contradict the principle. The coconut-palm and the gourd, for instance, occur in both hemispheres, but bear buoyant seeds that were probably spread by drifting over the oceans. In other cases, where similar plants were domesticated in both hemispheres, as with the fig, the cottonbush, and the strawberry, the plants belong to different species.

Old-World epidemic diseases. The voyages of Columbus and his colleagues brought smallpox from the Old World to the New for the first time, and yellow fever in the reverse direction; the hemispheres had no epidemic diseases in common. Syphilis, usually considered an American disease brought back to Europe by Columbus's ships, is a disputed case,

but it does not count because it is not strictly speaking an *epidemic* disease. These, to thrive, need the density of population found in the towns and villages of agricultural societies. Since hunting and food-gathering people are too thinly spread for epidemics, the common ancestors of the New and Old-World peoples must, when they parted company, have been in the hunting or food-gathering stage.

Old-World domestic animals. The Amerinds had no Old-World domestic animals except the dog, whose taming in the Old World goes back to the Neolithic hunting cultures. If the Amerinds' ancestors had had the horse or pig or chicken before they left the Old World, there is no reason why they should not have brought them along, especially since many Amerind tribes eagerly adopted these creatures when Europeans brought them to the New World.

Old-World calendars. The Mayan calendar differs drastically from Old-World calendars. Whereas the latter are based upon a year of twelve months of about 28 days each, with a few extra days to make it come out even, the Mayan calendar is based upon a year of eighteen months of 20 days each.

Old-World writing. Donnelly and others to the contrary notwithstanding, there is not the slightest resemblance between the Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, or any other Old-World script, and Mayan writing. Although the Mayan system is based upon principles much like those of Egyptian hieroglyphics, the signs and the language are entirely different. Hence our knowledge of Egyptian writing has been of no help in the decipherment of Mayan.

The Mayas also lacked the bellows, glazing, kiln-dried bricks, stringed musical instruments, the true arch, and the rake. Evidently the Mayas' ancestors arrived in their later homes unburdened by food plants, animals other than the dog, writing, or calendars—that is, as savages in the hunting or food-gathering stage of culture.

Some Atlantists argue that the Mayas might have been ordinary primitive Amerinds converted to civilization by a boatload of refugees from Atlantis. However, in the light of history, such conversion is unlikely. Most primitives are suspicious and conservative, reluctant to adopt foreign ways. If they let strangers settle among them at all, it is usually at the price of the strangers' dropping their own customs for those of the primitives. In fact the newcomers are lucky if they are not eaten, as happened to the first Spaniards in Yucatán. Thus the Norse settlers in Greenland, instead of influencing the Eskimos, were eventually absorbed by them; and the Spanish priest Jeronimo de Aguilar, found by Cortés after he had lived among the Mayas eight years, had not only failed to influence the natives, but had almost forgotten Spanish. Although primitives may sometimes pick up a culture-trait from visitors when it fits easily into their own pattern, they

usually submit to wholesale cultural change only as a result of long contact with or overwhelming pressure from a more advanced culture.

Now, to return to the characteristics of the Mayan civilization: The Mayan religion was much like other early agriculture polytheisms, with a multitude of departmental gods and an elaborate calendar of observances. Among their chief gods were the sky-god Itzamna and the rain-god Chac, who was more or less the same as the storm-god Kukulcan. Kukulcan in turn was equivalent to the Kiché Gucumatz and the Aztec Quetzalcoatl. Like Quetzalcoatl, Kukulcan had culture-hero functions. The story that he came from the west has led some historians to suppose that he was a real Mexican chief who conquered Yucatán under the New Empire. In the later stages of the New Empire the Mexicans did exert influence in Yucatán, but whether a real Kukulcan led them is one of those things that can probably never be settled.

Quetzalcoatl-Kukulcan has received disproportionate attention as a result of the Spanish friars' belief that he was the Apostle Thomas who had travelled about the Americas preaching. Needing some such theory to square the existence of the Amerinds with the New-Testament statements about the Apostles' being sent unto the ends of the earth, they studied the New World carefully for traces of the Apostles' passage. When they found that some tribes used the cross as a symbol (actually of the four winds or of the four cardinal directions) they were sure they had found a trace of Christian influence.

To justify the Conquest, the friars in Mexico made much of a blond god who civilized his people and then departed across the sea, having promised to return some day. In truth, however, Quetzalcoatl is always shown as black-haired and black-faced in the Aztec manuscripts, when he is not shown in the form of the masked wind-god Ehecatl. It has also been surmised, with just as little foundation, that he was a Norseman who had wandered south from the Vinland settlements. Actually the Amerinds of North and Central America have a widespread myth of culture-heroes who came from across the sea, often called "white," probably meaning white-clad or white-painted. Among the Yucatecan Mayas the white strangers are the Chanes, who landed from scaly boats at Vera Cruz, taught the people the civilized arts, and founded Chichén Itzá.

We can be quite sure these alleged civilizers weren't Norsemen, because when the Norsemen actually arrived, they found the myth already in circulation. Thorfinn Karlsevni's men captured a pair of Indian boys who, when they learned to speak Norse, told their captors that they understood that across the sea lay a land "where people went about in white clothes, uttered loud cries, and carried poles with banners fastened to them." Probably this is just one more family of culture-hero myths proving nothing historically, like the group of

Old-World stories about the archer (William Tell, Egil, Palnatoki, etc.) compelled by a tyrant to shoot an object from his son's head.

The gloomy Mayan religion was closely involved with the Mayan agriculture. It entailed a good deal of human sacrifice, though perhaps not on the grisly scale of the Aztecs, who killed as many as 20,000 people at the dedication of a single temple. The Mayas, like the Aztecs, ripped open victims and tore out their hearts; they threw virgins down sacred wells, shot other victims with arrows, mounted victims' heads on huge skull-racks next to their temples, and ate selected victims at ceremonial feasts.

Mayan religion was closely connected with Mayan astrology, a well-developed pseudo-science that made much of the revolutions of the planet Venus, and the Mayan calendar, which in turn was involved with the Mayan systems of numbering and writing. Since no Rosetta Stone for deciphering Mayan writing has ever been found, Mayologists have had to interpret written Mayan by the laborious process of trial and error. During the last century they have learned to read the numerals and calendric signs, the names of many of the gods, and some common nouns. The Mayas seemingly did not write verbs.

The Mayan written language was mainly ideographic—that is, a word was represented by a conventionalized picture, as in Chinese writing. In addition there were some phonetic elements, mostly standing for whole syllables, and the same glyph might be used either in the phonetic or in the ideographic sense. The precise extent to which the Mayas used phonetic elements in their script is a subject of dispute. Such writing may be called ikonomatic or rebus writing.

A Mayan glyph normally included two or three of these picture-elements wrapped around one another in a complicated fashion. Besides, the glyphs differed widely according to the scribe who was writing them, and according to whether they were painted on paper or chiseled on stone. Moreover a glyph might have two radically different forms: a "normal" form and a "head-form" that had only certain "essential elements" in common. If the normal form had, let us say, the essential element of three dots, the head-form would comprise one of those grotesque heads in profile that haunt Mayan art, with the three dots marked on the cheek or ear. The reader was supposed to be able to pick out the essential elements in either kind of glyph. In addition the Maya scribes sometimes used "full-figure forms" in which the head of the head-form was provided with a body, and "beast-forms" wherein the essential element was combined with a picture of a snake or other animal. Altogether they could hardly have made their system more cryptic if they had deliberately set out to do so.

The Mayas, like the ancient Gauls, used a vigesimal system of numbers

(with a base of 20 instead of 10). They had two systems of writing these numbers. One was ideographic like our Arabic system, with the usual head-forms and other complications, but without the place-value concept. Thus it had a series of symbols for the numbers from 0 to 19, and another set for multiples of numbers: 20, 400, 8000 and so on.

The other set of Mayan numerals, like our Roman system, used simple elements repeated; a dot represented 1 and a bar 5. But this system, like our Arabic system, used place-value; multiples were donated by stacking the symbols vertically, just as we string them out horizontally. For instance, the number 53 in this system would be:

Fifty-three is (2 × 20) + (13 × 1). In the first place, at the bottom of the stack (corresponding to the right-hand digit in an Arabic numeral the Mayas put the symbol for 13: two bars and three dots. In the second place, above the first, they put the symbol for 2 — two dots. The Mayas' greatest accomplishment was inventing symbols for zero several centuries *before* the Hindus, from whom we got our "Arabic" numerals, invented theirs.

You have probably heard of the Mayan calendar, whose system of leap-year corrections was more accurate than that of the Julian calendar that preceded the modern Gregorian calendar. Most of the existing Mayan writing is in fact concerned with keeping track of dates, a more difficult task among people of that level of culture than among us who have the Naval Observatory to help us.

During the Old Empire the Mayas employed a complicated system of recording the dates they chiselled on their monuments. They wrote out each date, not in one calendar, but in three. They recognized a period of 260 days, for which the Mayan name was probably *tzolkin,* divided up into shorter periods. Then they had a 365-day period, the *haab,* divided into 18 periods of 20 days each, with five extra days to make it approximately equal to the true solar year.

By writing the date of a given day according to both the haab-calendar and the tzolkin-calendar, the Mayas gave a combination that repeated itself only once in 52 haabs. Then to make sure there was no mistake, the Mayas also wrote the date in the "long-count" calendar, a system of recording the number of days that had elapsed since the date 4 *ahau* 8 *cumhu,* which on our calendar would be about 3113 B.C. Atlantists sometimes jump to the conclusion that the Mayan calendar must have been actually put into use at that time, but it is much more likely that 4 *ahau* 8 *cumhu* represented some event in Mayan mythology. Many Old-World calendars also start from

some mythical date, like the orthodox Jewish calendar which counts time from the Creation of the World in 3761 B.C. Morley believes that the Mayan calendar was devised, either by a single man or by a committee of priests, some time in the fourth or third century B.C.

To make things a little more complicated, the "long count" was recorded, not in a straight vigesimal system, but in a modified vigesimal system: 20 days made one *uinal;* 18 *uinals* made one *tun;* 20 *tuns* made one *katun,* and so on up by multiples of 20 thereafter to the great cycle of 2,880,000 days. We need not go into the lunar calendars and other complications.

Unfortunately the Mayas stopped using the "long count" several centuries before the Spaniards arrived, so that while we can locate dates accurately enough with relation to one another during the thousand-odd years that the long-count system was in use, we can only roughly correlate this system with our own. By using Mayan astrology, history, archeology, and other evidence, Mayologists have worked out several correlations between the two calendars, according to which Stela 9 at Uàxactún is dated all the way from 203 B.C. to 584 A.D. Three of these systems, by Goodman, Martínez Hernández, and Thompson, differ among themselves by a maximum of only five days, and are therefore lumped together as a single system. The Goodman-Martínez-Thompson system, according to which Stela 9 is dated 328 A.D., is now the most generally accepted.

The surviving Mayan literature consists of many inscriptions on temples and monuments, and three of the original Mayan books; plus some writings in the Mayan and Kiché languages using the Spanish alphabet. The three old codices are all religious, calendric, or astrological, the Dresden Codex being a prophecy covering a period of 34,000 years to the end of the world. The inscriptions contain similar matter, though some of them might possibly contain brief notices of historical events as well.

The Spanish missionaries in Yucatán quickly adapted their own alphabet to the native languages so that they could print prayers and hymns for their converts. The Indians found this system so much easier than their own writing that they soon dropped the latter and began writing their own languages in the Spanish alphabet. They wrote a number of village chronicles, perhaps transcribed from old native histories before these were destroyed, known as the *Books of Chilan Balaam* (or *Chilam Balam* or *Balan,* depending upon the dialect) of which about a dozen have survived. "Chilan Balaam" means literally "interpreter jaguar," the title of certain oracular priests of the pagan priesthood who were responsible for historical records, prophecies, and the like.

These books consist of brief notices, wrapped in obscure and enigmatic language, of plagues, tribal wars, the deaths of chiefs, and so on.

For instance the best of them, *The Book of Chilan Balaam of the Village of Mani,* begins: "This is the order of the katuns since the four katuns during which the Tutulxiu left their home and country Nonoual to the west of Zuiua, and went from the land and city of Tula, having agreed together to this effect."

In addition, the southwestern neighbors of the Mayas of Yucatán, the Kichés, wrote a work in Romanized Kiché, the *Popol Vuh,* which is mostly mythological. It tells of the creation of the world by the wind-god Hurakan, and a great feud between the gods Hun-Ahpu and Xbalanque on one side and the giant Vukub-Cakix and his family on the other. The fourth and last book of the *Popol Vuh* is devoted to the mythical progenitors of the Kichés, giving lists of battles and the genealogies of chiefs, which, while they may contain scraps of fact, don't agree with the scanty information from other sources.

Evidently the Mayas developed a historical literature, all of which has now been lost, at least in its original form. On the other hand it seems likely that their history never got beyond the stage of annals like those that monks kept in European monasteries during the Dark Ages. The latter read like this:

709. Hard winter. Duke Gottfried died.

710. Hard year and deficient in crops.

712. Great flood.

Better than nothing, but hardly to be compared with Herodotos or the *Books of Kings.*

However, by piecing together the statements of the *Books of Chilan Balaam* and the accounts of the Spanish clerics, we can get a good idea of Mayan history during the New Empire. (There are no surviving historical facts about the Old Empire, beyond what we can infer from archeology.) After the Mayas built their new cities in Yucatán around 100 A.D., a confederacy of the three strongest clans, the "League of Mayapan," dominated the peninsula for a time. These clans were the Xiu or Tutulxiu, the Cocom, and the Chel. About 1194 a Cocom chief, Hunac Ceel (pronounced "who knock kale?") of Mayapan, imported mercenary soldiers from Mexico to make war against Chac Xib Chac of Chichén Itzá (pronounced "chee-*chain* eet-*sah*"), chief of the Xius, and made his clan supreme in the land. Subsequently the Xius revolted under Ah Xupan Iiu and destroyed Mayapan, after which there was bitter warfare amongst the clans until the Spaniards came. The Spaniards were preceded by several years of plague and bad weather.

The Spaniards quickly overran the country by the terror their guns and horses inspired and by the atrocities they committed to cow the natives. Then the Mayas, fierce and wily fighters when aroused, revolted and drove the Spaniards out. It looked as though old confederacy would be revived, but the hatreds engendered

by the long feud proved too bitter. The Cocom chief lured a party of Xius, including the son of the Xiu chief, into Zotuta with protestations of friendship, and when they were asleep in the guest house set fire to the house and burned them all up.

This act touched off a terrific war between the Xius and the Cocoms, and when the Spaniards came back in 1537 the Xius went over to them, received baptism, and helped them conquer the other tribes. In 1541 the Spaniards and Tutulxiu together destroyed the army of 70,000 Cocoms in a last great battle.

The Mayas really had no chance; if these Spaniards had not conquered them somebody else would have. Given the great advantages in military tools and techniques that the Old World had over the New, any small, well-equipped, and resolutely led European army could have destroyed any of the major American states, as in fact happened in Mexico and Peru. The nature of tribal society with its small and mutually hostile communities made it impossible for any great number of Amerinds to unite against the White menace. Some always went over to the Whites to get even with their local enemies, just as many Greek city-states went over to the invading Persians, oblivious to their own fate once the outsiders gained control.

Finally the Middle Americans, while brave enough, had no notion of European strategy, tactics, and imperialistic methods of conquest and exploitation. They fought to capture prisoners to sacrifice to their gods, and after each side had caught its share they went home like gentlemen until the time came for another battle.

The Mayas' downfall may have been hastened by their priests' habit of issuing gloomy prophecies, such as:

> What time the sun shall brightest shine,
> Tearful will be the eyes of the chief,
> Four ages yet shall be inscribed,
> Then shall come the holy priest, the holy god.
> With grief I speak what now I see.
> Watch well the road, ye dwellers in Itzá.
> The master of earth shall come to us.

The priests' object may have been to keep their own people in a state of apprehension to make them easier to control. But as a result, when the Spaniards came, although some Mayas fought like demons, others sighed "This must be it" and stolidly awaited the end.

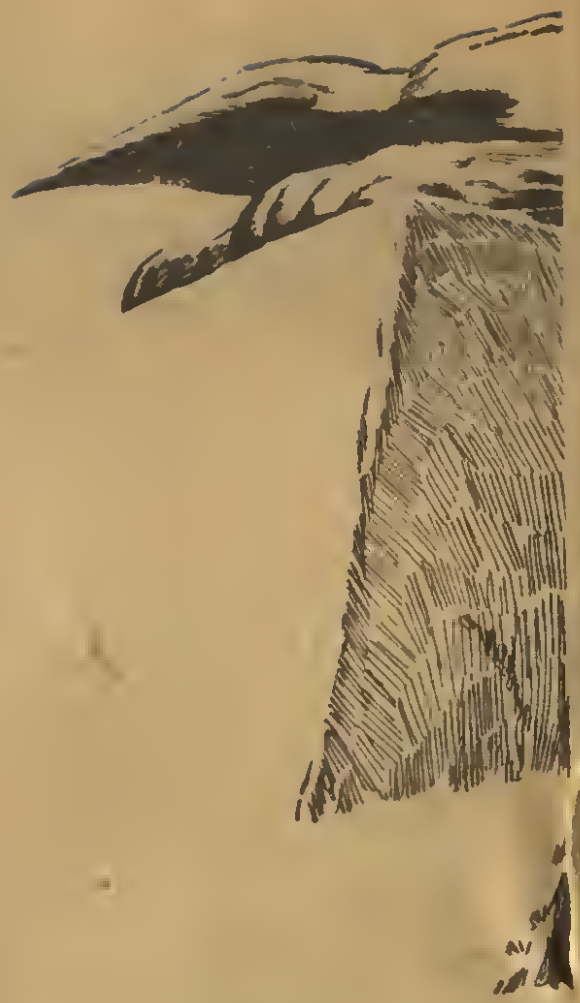
Magical and pseudo-scientific cults have subjected the Mayas to their attentions. During the 1930's Harold D. Emerson published a magazine, *The Mayan,* in Brooklyn, devoted to "spiritual enlightenment and scientific religion." It mixed Theosophy, Atlantism, a smattering of Mayan archeology, and general guff. Then a society called "The Mayas" sells correspondence courses in occultism from San Antonio, claiming that their leader received his initiation into the

transcendental mysteries from a Mayan priest in the jungles of Central America.

Still, the Mayan mysteries on examination turn out to be not so mysterious after all. The Mayas are neither morons nor Atlantean supermen, but a likeable and quite human people. If some of their ancient customs were not what we should consider good, neither were those of our own ancestors. The purpose of all this discussion of the Mayas is to show that, while we don't know many things about them, there is nothing in what we do know to suggest any great mystery in their background. The same factors that raised other civilizations — challenge-and-response, the workings of heredity to produce occasional geniuses, and the self-accelerating nature of technological progress—raised them from their primitive condition.

No Atlantis is necessary to account for the Mayas; in fact, their known history will not fit the lost-continent schemes of the Donnellys and Spences. They arose, not in immemorial antiquity, but about the beginning of the Christian Era. Their ancestors could not have been civilized before they reached Middle America. And finally, the Mayas were racially, linguistically, and culturally entirely distinct from the Egyptians and other Mediterranean peoples, so that any theory based on a supposed common origin of the Mayan and the Phoenician, Egyptian, or other Mediterranean civilization falls to the ground. While these arguments do not in themselves disprove the existence of Atlantis, they certainly knock one of its main props out from under it.

BEYOND THE BARRIER



Having searched many strange worlds in his quest for Arl, Mion at last reached Helios, where his beautiful wife was being held captive by the Ellans; but neither he nor his comrades had expected to arrive as chained slaves, helpless against Ellan overlords.

By Richard S. Shaver

Illustrated by Charles Hornstein

Synopsis of Previous Installments: When Mutan Mion's beloved wife, Arl, was kidnapped from the court of mighty goddess Vanue, the only clue was a telepathic message received by one of the Peirae, an egg-laying race of females condemned to a life of loneliness without men by an age-old order of the Council of the Ancient Titans. But in exchange for guiding Mutan Mion to the secret passage through the mysterious Barrier, which was an area of tremendous gravitational intensity barring the way to a universe even more grand than our own, the Peirae demanded his services in carving out a new edict-free existence for them in

the new universe, and in battling the strange races that would oppose them.

Accepting the task, Mutan and his warrior comrade, Tyron, boarding the warship Darkome *with their faithful crew, go to the assistance of Elder Oracle and ruler of Peira, Averna. Elyse, one of the court, is their guide, and arriving, they are feted grandly. But Mion, anxious to be about the work, is introduced to Saphele, a female space trader who discovered the way through the Barrier. She tells him it is via a pair of planets whose orbit intersects both universes, and the passage is by means of a tunnel bored to the center of one of them. The space ship is driven to the center while in one universe, remains there while the passage is made, then*

emerges in the other universe.

Mion learns from Averna that they have plans to regain their normal human nature (robbed from them by the ancient variform surgery) and he is to be a virtual "father" to the new race. He rebels, because of Arl, but does not refuse, merely leaving the decision to the future.

Descending the shaft in the hollow world, they are trapped in the tunnel, which is too narrow. Below them an enemy ship appears. But in the ensuing battle, Mion is victorious, and with the ship released, the passage is made. They have captured a Proteus type form of life, and make friends with it. Guided to the native planet of the proteus-people, they set up an initial base.

While ferrying more Peiran ships through the Barrier, they are attacked by the Daegun, a type of warlike crab people, and it is evident much military preparation will have to be made. Eventually, tiring of delay, Mion decides to take the initiative and attack the Daegun. He does so, and in a whirlwind campaign, shatters their empire. But although the trail to Arl has led to the Daegun, it does not end there, for she is not among the captives. Mion learns she has been sold to a mysterious race known as the Ellans. Continuing his search, he heads the Darkome *into unknown space, toward the Ellan menace.*

Sidetracked to a planet where life is detected, the expedition discovers a weird race of people who are so intent on making their planet safe from disease that they are rendering it completely sterile. Their obsession has always resulted in a planet they are eventually unable to live upon, and always they have migrated to a new world, leaving behind them a trail of completely sterile worlds. They have a super spaceship for this purpose, which Mutan Mion appropriates, as it is one of the original Elder ships, and he wishes to make use of its possible Elder Armament, more vast and potent than anything known today.

On another planet, a completely idyllic life is found, on the face of it, yet a hidden menace lurks. Here life has been developed to the point where even dwellings are grown from living, intelligent creatures. The very houses are alive, and servants to the occupants. However, several evil minds, reduced by their life experiments to mere brains in bottles, have taken over the agrarian people, made robots of them. In a ray battle with the minds, Mutan Mion overcomes them and frees the slave population of the planet.

Now go on with the story:

THE work of reorganizing the Vi-ans into a stable state once again took a lot of time. Nearly all of them suffered from mind mutilations, hardly knew their names or their trades. The Peirans did wonderful work re-establishing their mental connecting neurons, bringing back the minds lost for many years in the darkness of the inability to think.

But from several islands came re-

cruits, citizens who had fled the rebellion and remained hidden. From these, who had worked hard to keep alive their people's wonderful techniques, Mion learned those secrets he was willing to put off his quest for Arl to obtain. From them he also learned the location of the most probable planet to search for Arl.

The sealed force screen about the huge minds in the crystal spheres of nutrient remained in place, and would so remain for centuries. The Vi-ans had no desire to struggle with them, preferring to let them rot within their prison (as they would with no way of renewing the supporting culture fluids that kept them alive).

Once more back on the trail, the *Darkome* and the *Adventure* built up speed toward the center of this star cluster, called *Ora* by the Vi-ans. Within sealed drawers of both ships were seeds of the wonderful plant houses of the Vi-ans, as well as eggs of the boat-bird and other marvels of their creation.

* * *

Nearly ten days later, after passing some seven great suns of the cluster. they approached their destination. This sun they named Ora Eight. Selecting the planet showing the greatest amount of green surface, they slowed and circled it. It was a vast planet, but its gravitational attraction was no greater than many smaller worlds. To Mion, this meant it was an ancient world as worlds go, with its core of dense rock and metals covered by many thousands of miles of lighter debris. accumulated during its evolution. The exterior was, of course, made up of forest detritus, peat beds, coal, plant growth compressed by the weight of time into endless depths of carbon. Such a world was well along on its way to becoming a sun, awaiting only the cosmic spark to set it aflame forever.

The oceans were small, but distributed in many small groups, like great lakes occurring frequently, many of which were probably fresh water. Picking the largest of these, they set the two ships down near the center. Driving along the ocean's surface with their subsidiary jets, they skirted the coast lines for near a thousand miles, searching for cities, or for signs of intelligent life.

A black dome, smooth and perfect in shape, rose up ahead. It was on a cliff, and commanded a view of the coast line.

"If that thing contains life, it has seen our approach," commented Mion, as they swung about and waited, some miles away. Beside him Elyse swung a penetray toward the huge dome, itself large as a mountain. The substance of which it was made, however, proved impenetrable to rays that could normally penetrate thirty miles of solid rock. A vast, enigmatic, rounded smoothness, it spelled trouble to Mion; for it was no phenomenon of nature, that dome. It had been built. and well built. The impenetrable surface of it told him that here dwelt an intelligence more deeply conversant with the secrets of nature than the greatest minds of far-off Enn, the center of the League.

The wildness of the rest of the planet, the impregnable nature of this dome, told bim that here dwelt one witb little use for his fellow creatures, perhaps a creature completely alone and desirous of remaining so. Yet the place was big enougb to shelter an army. Why should he think of it as one man's—one mind's—work?

Elyse interjected a comment into his thought: "Because of its total lack of beauty or ornamentation. Many minds would require some relief, some aesthetic variation in their surroundings, and would bave gardens, flowers, beauty of some kind about them. Not this one, however. It wants its solitude unbroken by any distraction in the form of the handiwork of intelligence."

"Whatever built it, that one is mighty!" breathed Mion, impressed in spite of himself by the stark simplicity and strength of the dome. "I doubt the wisdom of inquiring further concerning the owner!"

"Ominous ugliness, indeed," answered Elyse. "Let us push on to the other side of this promontory and see if the far side of the dome gives any clue . . "

A telaug beam from the *Adventure* touched them, and Saphele breathed in a whisper: "There is a hum of activity inside, rotors of some kind whirling in their sockets, a quite extensive installation of power mechanisms. Look at your detectors."

The dials they had not examined told of extensive and varied vibrations from within. Mion scratched his head, puzzled. It was the height of folly to arouse anything so evidently possessed of vast power, as well as an obvious desire to be left alone. Yet they needed certain repairs, and it would be wise to replenish their food stocks. They had expected this planet to be the center of the Ellan peoples' widespread empire—if they were an empire. Instead there was only this wilderness of sea and forest and wild life, and this enigmatic dome of black, smooth . . .perhaps metal, perhaps rock . . . treated in some way to make it impervious to any ray.

His indecision was resolved for him, for suddenly from the water about them projected a series of smooth metallic poles. Up these upthrusting poles rose rapidly the rings attached to an underwater net of metal strands. Before they were aware what was happening, they were lifted from the water like two fish in trap. Mion's hand went to the antigravs, to lift them free of tbe meshes, but before he could press tbe stud, the poles shot up even further, and leaned over to close above them. Evidently the mind behind the control of the mechanism hidden by the water was quite aware of all the thought taking place in their two vessels. They were caught, neatly, and Mion wondered if trying to blast loose with the full power of bis terrible rays wouldn't bring down on them sudden and certain destruction. Even as he pondered this, the poles bent above them began to glide as if along some hidden track beneath the water, and the two ships were carried

toward the vast side of the dome where it reared above the water. The cliff on which it stood was now seen to contain an opening, a cavernous sea-cave in which the waves roared and surged. Into this opening the rushing net device carried them, a movement so level and even they knew the whole thing was running on rails under water. Elyse, her voice calm but heavy with the strain, murmured to Mion:

"This is evidently the way the dwellers in this dome feed themselves. They trap the great fish and whales and such things that venture near them, carry them inside. It could be they do not even know we are not some water monster! It could be an automatic device, which trips itself into action on the arrival of some prey above it."

"It could be, but I suspect it is operated in this case by a hand that has above it a mind reading our minds."

THE place the net device stopped was high and vaulted, seeming too great to be the work of anything but nature. The waves lapped gently, in here, against the rough rock walls. There was reflected light from the opening, shining up from the water's dark surface. There were smoothed floors, beyond the water. A ray from the *Adventure* touched Mion, where he sat watching the gloomy dim scene in the sea cavern, and he heard Tyron say: "Rith?"

Automatically he answered: "Metic!" as he had so many years ago in math class, so often. Then Tyron's meaning sank in. "Rith?" means "have you written"? and the answer, if the given problem has been "met", means, of course. "The problem has been met and conquered," the final "ic" means "I understand." "I see."

Their "problem" had not even been given them in full yet—what did Tyron mean? Then Mion saw the vast doorway, looming above the gloom, and understood. That doorway meant this dweller in the dome was a gigantic creature, to require so vast a door for his entrance. His fishing apparatus further showed his size, for what living creature would need nets of the strength and size he had used to snare their two gigantic ships of space? What creature could *eat* the huge sea creatures that net was built to catch?

But the dome might be but an automatic set for a great number of people who dwelt far distant. It could be the fish nets of a city, for certainly such a contrivance could supply a city with sea food, if there were in that sea creatures of a size to fit the nets.

But something told Mion that this was no isolated trap set by some numerous people. There were no evidences of them around. There was a gloomy loneliness here. An impression of some mighty presence, a great mind, the mind of some gigantic thinking life, lay just beyond his telaug's perceptions, and try as he might he could not focus its vibrations and bring them up to audi-

bility.

They waited, in a tense watchfulness, and the silent minutes dragged by. The nets holding them did not relax. They remained just above the surface of the lapping water, held immovable. If they had been some creature like a whale-shark, that had to breathe water, they would now be struggling for their last oxygen.

Mion heard Elyse whisper: "Here it comes! L-look at the knife!"

Bending its enormous body to clear the vast top of the vaulted opening in the dome above, came a creature whose form they could see clearly enough to know it was manlike. But as it straightened, they gasped. Giant man, yes, but where its head should be was nothing but the bony ridge of its shoulders, a ridge shaped and rounded into an obvious weapon, as purposeful as the horns on a goat. In the rounded hollows of the shoulder its eyes were set, great round eyeballs rolling right and left as it stood there surveying the strange objects its nets had brought. In one hand it bore a knife, which in proportion to its size was perhaps not too large, but was all of thirty feet in length.

"Come to carve up its fish," muttered Mion, twisting his telaug ray on the thing to catch its thought, which he had but sensed before.

In the other huge hand it bore a fish spear, two-tined and barbed, but a spear all of a hundred feet in length and not disproportionate to that giant, holding it as a man would hold his dinner fork. The thing stood there, looking at its peculiar metal fish, then strode toward the two ships, reaching them in three great strides.

It peered into the side ports, but they were not ports in truth, but metal rounds which relayed to the inner connections visual impressions in the form of electric pulses, much the same as a televisor pick-up. It walked around the ships, clambering over the net and metal pole arrangement easily, surveying them from all sides. Then it lay down its implements and reached out great hands to twist off their entry ports. Mion feared it might damage the air locks with its vast strength and turned a beat ray on the hands, so that the giant stepped back, growling with rage. As it spoke, it used manlike terms, then it turned away, moved back toward his entrance cave.

"Don't let him get away, he might have weapons above that would be too powerful!" cried Elyse, but Mion did not need the encouragement. He touched the vast back of the giant-without-a-head with a heavy charge of shorter, paralyzing him, held him there motionless as his legs slowly collapsed and he fell to the floor with a sound like thunder in the echoing cavern.

Even as he fell, the air-locks swung open, and Nortans swarmed out, quickly securing the creature's arms as well as his legs with wire cables. Then Mion shut off the shorter, and immediately the giant tried to break the unbreakable metal strands. After a second's struggle with the

bonds, the giant relaxed. A mouth opened in his chest, they heard his voice rumbling.

Mion, his telaug on the giant, translated for Elyse and the others now crowding the doorway to see the bigger screens of the control chamber, which gave a view even better than their own eyes would have from the air-locks, as they magnified to any desired ratio. But Elyse hushed him, for she had switched on the telaug general communicator, which gave out the giant's thought to everyone.

"What are you who come thus to Vernon the ancient? Speak, before those who dwell above with me strike you down."

Mion, reading his mind more deeply than his words, knew there was no one above, that this creature lived here alone. But knowing how betrayed one can be by telaug, which sometimes gives impressions not correct due to the complex nature of abstract thought, Mion answered the giant, speaking with his telaug beam into the space between his eyes and mouth where his brain should be.

"We are peaceful visitors, ancient one. We have been caught in your trap by accident, it seems. We have no desire to harm you."

"Then release me and go your way. I want no visitors. I am Veron, the mighty, who needs no other life but his own."

"Then who are those above who would strike us?" asked Mion, chuckling to have so soon exposed his ruse.

The giant freak, the queer expressionless expanse of his chest giving no hint of his thought, only grunted. His thought went on, however. It sounded like: "Just let them release me, and I will seal this cave off from above and let them starve down here."

He seemed simple-minded to the active minds of the Peirans and Nortans. But Mion did not underestimate him. He switched the beam to his Nortan crewmen, ordered them to take hand weapons, explore the dome overhead, report everything they found to him. A score of them set out up the vast slope of the ramp that led upward into darkness.

From the portable telaug communicator they heard the surprised exclamation: "It's an observatory!"

Elyse raised startled eyes to Mion's. "We'd better go over nohead's head again" she smiled, "We seem to have missed something."

THE four, Mion and Tyron and the two Peiran's who had appointed themselves their personal assistants, started the long job of recording every thought they could arouse in the fiercely resisting mind of the bound giant. Slowly the story came out of him. . . .

He was the superintendant of this station, a creature built as he was in order that he would have no desire to leave it. Powerful, loyal to his creators, intelligent in his own special way, he was the perfect "keeper" of the guard station. His job was to watch for invaders, and the great dome was his observatory, from which he watched the skies eternally.

Not with his own eyes, but with the recording eyes of numerous powerful telescopes. He had missed them only because he had not yet examined his photos and vibration detector charts. When his trap had sprung he had assumed he had caught some leviathan of the deep, and had descended prepared to cut its meat into pieces for his food freezer lockers. On every planet surrounding the star cluster into which they were plunging headlong sat exactly similar observatories, and the word of their coming must have gone ahead of them more than once.

Mion gave a cry as he examined the records from the giant's reluctant mind. "These are observatories built by the Ellans. They fear invasion . . . they are a mighty people." His last words contained a little awe. For the creation of such a powerful servant as this no-headed giant, a robot of such size and capabilities, told him much about them. It also told him they had little regard for the rights of the lesser members of their society, to raise up such unhappy monstrosities about themselves.

Elyse sighed, looking at the giant's image on her screen.

"I'd say we're apt to put our foot in a trap, going into the power of a people who think so gloomily. No tender-hearted people would ever make of living flesh a being doomed to a lifetime of loneliness, without reprieve. He thinks of himself, of his gigantic loneliness, in such an unhappy way. . ."

Mion sat with his brows creased in thought. These Ellans were not at all as he had been led to believe, a happy and enlightened offshoot of the ancient Hellenes. "Perhaps these creatures were not created by their scientists, but are some indigenous form of life they adapted to this purpose," he suggested as his brows furrowed deeper. For he could not lead his two ships into the power of a vast civilization based upon cruelty. "It could well be. I must learn from this giant what are his true origins."

Silently he set to work on the tiring mind of the giant man that was not a man. He must learn how his kind came to exist, and what they might expect from the Ellans when they finally reached their populated worlds. Every suggestion he inserted over his beam the powerful mind quenched instead of allowing his suggestion to call forth trains of thought that would inevitably reveal a panorama of his life experience. After many hours he gave up. The giant would have to be drugged to get anything useful from his mind.

But he was never to complete his examination. For, as night fell outside the sea cavern, a score of penetrative rays crashed down through the rocks of the cavern and struck everyone there into instant unconsciousness. When the giant had not given his regular signal, the guard ships of the Ellans had sped to his aid.

WHEN the crews of the *Adventure* and the *Darkome* regain-

ed their senses, they found themselves prisoners aboard their own ships, speeding toward some unknown destination. Locked in their cabins, they learned little except that the crew-men who brought their food were the fair-haired, tall and fine looking Ellans they had sought so long.

On the second day of their journey. they found their bonds taken off. They were herded into one of the largest cargo compartments, there chained together and left. Evidently the Ellans wanted their comfortable cabins for their own use.

"Anyway, it's a relief to be able to move even this much," commented Saphele, jangling her leg chains mournfully.

No one answered her, at first. They were all plunged into gloom by the ignominious capture. They were all at fault, having been so occupied examining their strange prisoner and the queer vast structure above the cave that they had given no thought to ordinary precautions of safety. There had been no one watching the automatic detectors which must have given ample warning of the approach of the powerful Ellan warcraft. Somehow none of them had expected to run into their own techniques of ray usage in a people so long removed from the original sources of ray science.

Of their approach to the home planets of the Ellans they saw nothing. Led from the ship, after landing, they found themselves marched along magnificent avenues filled with commerce and gaily clad, fine looking men and women who paid no slightest attention to them. They were already a part of the slave population, and as such apparently worthy of no more attention than was needed to keep them from breaking free! Mion heard Tyron grind his teeth as they clanked along. The people on the walkways beside and above the wide avenue looked at them with but one curious glance, a glance which summed them up as: "Just some more captives, to be sold in the market."

"Evidently," grumbled Tyron in his deep bass, "they are a slave empire, and they see this sight every day. I can understand now why they need those observatories to warn them of impending invasion. They must be surrounded by enemies from whom they have plundered slaves."

"Once a society begins to enslave its people, their retreat from the process is difficult." Elyse was mentally trying to find excuses for these handsome people, who looked both happy and prosperous. How could they be happy, if their society depended wholly upon slave labor? To the Peirans, there was a horror in the carefree throngs of handsome people who could pass them so heedless of their plight, without even a pitying glance.

"And certainly," amended Mion, "all slave empires end up in a shambles, and this one will as well! Men like freedom."

Tyron growled: "I could add a few rivers of blood to that shambles myself."

The trail led Mion ever closer

to his lost love, Arl of Atlan.

Mion let his eyes roam back along the line of their progress. His crew, with the little Peiran females sandwiched between, were hungry and mad clean through. The Peirans were not their lovely gay selves. Instead they were each wearing a frown, incongruous on their elfin faces, and Mion would have given a Darkan Gem-stone to read their thoughts just now.

There was one ray of hope in the situation for Mion. He seemed to be treading the same path Arl must have trod, and there was a chance he would meet her or find traces of her.

The slave market they were taken to was a long, low building. They had not seen the city from overhead, had no idea of its extent, so could not locate the market in relation to the city. They only knew they were taken into a low building, more like a vast cattle shed inside than anything else, and shoved into a row of stalls. There were some half-dozen rings set in the wooden walls, and their chains were fastened to these. Thus separated into groups, Mion knew that the chances were good they would never see their companions again.

With him in his stall was Elyse, and two of his Nortan crew, and two of the Peiran women, six in all. Mion deduced the slaves were shown in groups of six as they came, then sold separately or in a group of six as the buyers desired. Like good cattle dealers, Mion figured, they meant to sell their slaves before captivity had made them thin and spiritless.

Night had fallen, and they were brought soup and bread, but not unchained. The night dragged interminably; sleep would not come. Mion lay and fretted and blamed himself for letting the Ellan ships surprise them. But he had been busy with the giant watchman of the black dome, and could hardly blame himself if the others had failed to set proper watch. Chances were they had, but had been touched with a sleep ray. It was possible they could not have fought them off if they had seen them in time. Also it would have meant many deaths.

Finally, Mion slept restlessly. It was a long night. Waking many times, Mion guessed this planet must turn slowly on its axis, to make so long a darkness. There was nothing to mark the passage of time but the occasional step of a passing guard.

WHEN the sun rose at last, a squad of the Ellan soldiery came, removed Mion and Tyron from their chains. They were marched off between two files of the black-uniformed Ellans, topping them by a good yard of Nortan muscle and bone. Mion smiled to think what they two could do to this dozen of sleek, careless warriors if they chose.

They entered a car outside the slave mart. It was not an internal combustion engine, Mion noted, but some type of drive with which he was unfamiliar. It was noiseless and powerful. They sped through the still empty streets at breakneck speeds. The pave was smooth and well laid,

the houses were all rather too large for one family use. Mion did not question his captors, nor did Tyron, preferring to maintain a stony silence, though they could understand many of the words of the tongue. It was an offshoot of the old Mantong spoken universally among the members of the League. There was no doubt in Mion's mind that these Ellans truly originated beyond the barrier. He was not overawed by the luxurious dwellings of marble and granite, the polished and shining walls and pillars and colorful roofs of tile. This city was not particularly well laid out, to his way of thinking. Some streets were narrow and crooked, the evidence of great age in eroded pillars and cracked paves. But the main avenues along which they sped were wide and clean, with grassed areas where flowers and fruit bloomed, and here and there a gardening slave at work on the plots. There were few vehicles parked along the streets, Mion deduced they were kept beneath the houses, as many ramps ran down to closed doors from the roadway. An occasional flying craft soared overhead, on jets which left long trails of vapor behind. Mion wondered if their jets were inefficient—the craft were traveling so slowly the sound was heard before the ship was seen.

Their big bus-like vehicle drew up at last before a gigantic edifice, of ornate colonnades and roofs of great complexity, brilliant with gilded stone scroll-work and sculptures of polished granite. They marched up a long series of low stairways of stone to reach the great double valves of bronze, open to the morning breeze. A score of soldiers were on duty at each side the great doorway. Their black uniforms and the gleaming handles of their weapons, a raygen of unfamiliar design, made a brave show, though somewhat ominous and gloomy to Mion's mind.

The officer in charge of the squad presented a rolled paper to the officer of the guards on duty, and he waved them in. The interior was lofty, with impressive art work on the tall shadowed walls. Mion saw that the Ellans possessed a fine talent for architecture. As his eyes became accustomed to the interior gloom, he was even more impressed by the wall paintings and statuary, neither ostentatious nor gaudy, but wholly in keeping with their purpose, that of making a great palace more beautiful. They marched through these lofty halls for many minutes before they halted before another pair of tall bronze doors, guarded by fifty stalwart soldiers. Again their officer presented his orders, and again they proceeded through the doors that opened before them silently, concealed machines moving the great weight with quick ease.

Mion paused here, giving a little gasp of appreciation. The towering pillars of the throne room, as he guessed it to be, arched out like trees overhead in a lacy fretwork of ivory and gold. Fountains at the base of each ivory column sprayed delicately scented and colored waters into cir-

cular troughs about the base of each column. Brilliantly plumaged birds drifted idly among the pillar tops as though in their native wood. Their songs and some muted distant music gave the place an atmosphere of delicious languor, like a great wood on a summer day. The boot heels of their guards were muted by flowering rushes strewn on the marble floor, and as they progressed across the vast chamber, the rushes underfoot gave way to a green carpet of what felt like thick moss underfoot, but Mion guessed was a woven stuff simulating the rich green moss of the forest.

Their guards came to attention before a dais, on which were two tall thrones of some pale green stone, veined with white and sparkling with bits of gold. Both thrones were empty, but on the floor level a tall elderly man sat writing at a long table that ran to one side of the dais. Papers were strewn about the table top in some disorder, and the several ornate chairs beside the table were pushed this way and that, as though there had been a conference here last evening which had not yet concluded, but would be resumed today. The man looked up, his long face bearded with gray whiskers to his waist. He had a thin sharp nose, and very large dark eyes that looked on them a little wearily. Mion gathered here was a man overworked, probably the Minister of State under some careless and proud monarch whose excesses aggravated his tasks into insurmountable obstacles.

The officer of their guard presented his little scroll of orders. The man nodded, the guards stepped back, leaving Mion and Tyron facing the great dark eyes above the long beard. They both clanked the chains at their wrists, and looked at the elderly man with a stony nonchalance. Neither of them spoke, and a long minute ticked by while the sharp lean nose and the weary eyes examined them. Finally he said: "Of course you do not understand our tongue?"

Mion smiled and shook his head, to see what he would make of a reply to his question. The man smiled in return, revealing large stained teeth behind his beard. Mion decided he did not particularly like this official. He went on. "Oh, you do understand, but choose not to speak? Is that what you mean?"

Mion shook his head, spoke to Tyron. "Wait until we must to reveal that we understand much of their speech."

Tyron growled wearily. "Aye, Captain; we might accidentally learn something to our advantage if they think us unable to understand them. It's odd they wouldn't already be using a telaug on us. They must have the device—they seem to have so many of the devices familiar to our side of the Barrier."

"It may have been lost—they have been here for untold centuries. I wonder what they make of us?"

The official turned to the officer who had brought them. "You reported capturing these giants in two great warships, while they were occupied inspecting one of our space observa-

tories. What sort of craft were they?"

"One was an ancient craft such as our legends speak of, and the inscriptions in it were in the ancient tongue of Ellas. The other craft was recently built, incomprehensible to us for the most part. They come from some very advanced race, perhaps from beyond the Barrier, for I have never heard of such ships on this side. It is possible they know the secret of the Barrier, which is why I suggested they be examined properly before they are sold to some one who does not have the interests of the Empire at heart. The passage of the Barrier could be a fact of vast value . . . or a threat to our supremacy."

"You are of the ships who took these giants captive. You were sent to me by your superior officer? What officer, and from what ship? Give me all the details?"

THE officer drew himself up, saluted, turned to the soldier behind him who handed him a small casket. He handed the casket to the man at the table. "That contains detailed records taken of the whole affair, from the time we detected the warning signal from the dome of Veron, the headless creature who keeps the dome. He captured the two ships in his nets, by accident when they tripped his trap device. The signal was noticed when Veron failed to turn it back every ten dials, as is the procedure."

The whole group stood waiting while the official inserted the records in a playback beneath the table. The playing of the records took him a good hour, for it contained endlessly recounted details as each officer of the squadron who had attacked made his own oral report. Mion noted the reports were all oral and not mental which spelled the complete lack of telaug techniques. He also noted, somewhat with approval, their way of dispensing with all official formality, no titles or names were used except when necessary. It would have taken hours for such a report under the formal rules in force in many parts of the Nortan Empire.

As the old official concluded examination of these records, he eyed the two standing chained before him with a new respect. "You were lucky." His dark eyes were on the young officer standing rigidly at attention. "If you had not by some chance come down on those ships unnoticed, they would have wiped you out. Their weapons are far superior to our own!"

The officer smiled: "We understood that, afterward. When we had finally understood how to activate some of their rays, we nearly dropped in terror of what they could have done to us under other circumstances. They must not have known they were near our boundaries."

"Which leads one to think they are from beyond the Barrier, not to know. Good, Captain Almerak. You may return to your ship, but there will be a promotion for you very soon. I'll see to it myself. Instead of Squadron commander, Fleet Commander Almerak. Barring interference. . ." the

dark eyes pierced the officer's, and Almerak nodded understanding. Mion gathered that such appointments were subject to capricious higher power, which might want any given position for some favorite instead.

The oldster turned back to Mion, his eyes very interested. "I wish we could converse. I'm sure we'd find it educational. But until you learn our language, there isn't much I can do for you. Our laws are rather simple, and without loopholes. All captives of any kind whatsoever are sentenced to slavery. There is no alternative, though in this case there is no proof of warlike intentions. But I can have you bought for my own household. However, my personal finances may not prove sufficient to buy your whole company. . . . Well, we'll see! Take them away, Captain. I'll thank you to keep them off the block until I can arrange for their purchase by . . ." he paused, and Almerak nodded quickly. Mion gathered that all was not well in the Empire of Ellas. Evidently they did not want their recent captives to fall into hands of certain buyers. There could be but one reason—there were powerful forces at work to undermine the Imperial power. He gave Tyron an eye as they turned to take their place between their guards again, and Tyron winked. They marched out of the silent, seemingly empty palace, and entered the military bus again.

As they took their seats in the bus, which was a tight fit for their huge bodies, Tyron growled: "We may have a chance to team up with . . ." he let the rest go, looking out the open side of the bus over the rooftops of the colorful city. Mion nodded, grinned. "Certain parties here should be very interested in getting their hands on us. The bidding may be interesting."

"Our arrival may precipitate troubles brewing for years. . ." murmured Mion. "It sounded to me as if they really feared someone, someone who may make a strong effort to get hold of us and our ships."

"I guess we'll know whose side to choose," grinned Tyron.

The rest of the ride back to the mart they sat in silence.

THE next day was very different. Now the populace had heard who the huge captives were, and their curiosity was fully aroused. The mart was thronged all day with the citizens of Helios, as the city was named. Thousands pushed and jammed trying to get close enough to their stalls to get a good look at them, and everyone in earshot tried to question them. They did not answer, but some of the Peirans essayed some replies in the Ellan tongue, which gave rise to vast amusement.

But as the long day began to darken into dusk, the crowds diminished. When they had finished their evening meal, the darkness outside was sprinkled here and there with lights, and within the big shedlike mart the overhead lights came on. The guards began their pacing, and the Nortans and Peirans tried to find some rest,

though their chains kept them from stretching out in comfort. It was then, as the night's silence was beginning that a tall, cloaked individual came up to their stall, and stood there regarding them with a somehow knowing smile on his lean dark-eyed face. After some minutes he glanced around, to make sure there were no guards near, then whispered: "I know you understand me. I am prepared to offer you freedom if you will help our cause."

Mion, who had been waiting for something like this since his interview with the palace official, stood up and moved toward the low barrier beyond which the stranger stood. Mion answered him. "You know very well we cannot refuse any reasonable offer. We know nothing of any causes, we can bargain for our freedom only with our gratitude."

His enunciation of the words caused the stranger to smile, for he handled the ancient Ellan tongue far differently than the Ellans. But it was sufficient. Again glancing around, the stranger whispered: "I will arrange an escape for you, all of your party. They will not be quite sure who is behind it. Later, we will manage either to acquire your ships, or perhaps to construct similar powerful weapons. This regime is not popular. Of course, all the slaves would rise behind us. The slaves number nearly twice the citizens."

Mion smiled in turn and reached out his hand, into which the stranger's slender palm disappeared, and he winced as Mion shook his hand in sudden emotion. "We will find a way to repay you, never fear. We have no wish to spend our lives toiling as slaves for a people so inhospitable. We came in peace."

The narrow head nodded, flashed Mion one lean-lipped smile revealing long brilliant teeth. Then he moved away, nodding casually to the approaching guard, who spoke a good evening to him.

Tyron, in the next stall, had been leaning out over the low front barrier to watch this interchange. But he had not caught the whole conversation. He asked: "Does that mean what I think it means?"

Mion smiled grimly. "Revolt is brewing, as we suspected. These Ellans think that with our weapons on their side they might overturn things. I'm willing to give it a whirl, but the Peirans might just as well remain in slavery until we can release them. . ."

Elyse gave a cry of indignation which brought the distant guard on a run. But as he looked in to find them all merely talking quietly to each other, he grinned knowingly and moved away again. Then Elyse hissed: "You think to leave us behind in this thing when you might win free and these rebels might still be conquered and destroyed. Oh no! We go with you, if it is to be that way."

Mion smiled, and Tyron took his Saphele in his arms. Then they composed themselves to sleep. But sleep was long in coming.

A crashing, smashing uproar overhead awakened them. The Pei-

rans huddling around the Nortans in fright of the darkness and the terrible sounds. The hiss of deadly rays came down from the roaring dark, and then a shaft of blinding light struck near their pens, drifting swiftly along the corridors of rough enclosures. Their eyes adjusting now to the weird chaos of darkness and brilliant searching beams multiplying everywhere in the huge structure about them, they saw the roof had been pierced and entered by some long, narrow flying craft. The entrance had broken the light circuits, or they had been purposely destroyed, and the ship hung overhead, searching downward with its lights for . . . Mion suddenly bellowed out: "Here! Here is what you seek."

His rendering of the Ellan tongue was probably atrocious but it served. The craft dropped lower—a ladder of wire cable snaked down to their pen. Tyron grasped it, held it while one by one they swarmed up the slender swaying strands.

Minutes later they were blasting skyward, jets flaming behind them, and they found themselves within an Ellan spacecraft. Behind them may have been turmoil, a city rising to arms against unknown raiders, but they knew nothing of that. They had been on their way for some ten or fifteen minutes when their long-faced friend with the dark eyes and flashing teeth came to them, and Mion asked: "It was you at the controls during the rescue? You will have the whole Imperial fleet on your trail, will you not?"

He was clad in a uniform very different from the gloomy imperial black, relieved only by the glitter of their weapons. His uniform, if such it was, consisted of a tunic of shimmering gold, on which was embroidered a diving eagle in brown and silver thread, its prey just beneath its spread talons was a small human figure in black. Beneath the short tunic he wore close fitting turkish trousers of light blue and short boots of soft leather. He looked very handsome, his dark eyes alight with pleasure and relief, his long teeth flashing in a brilliant smile as he answered. "It is nothing. I have escaped them dozens of times in this ship of mine. I am to them a much wanted outlaw, with a price on my head. Perhaps it would have been fairer if I had explained my status to you, for in case of capture you might share my fate. But there was no time."

He sat beside them, they were all in acceleration chairs arranged along the walls of the long narrow passenger compartment. These chairs were on swivels, so balanced as to swing with the direction of pressure during flight deceleration or sudden turns. Now, during ordinary and constant pressure, they could be turned by the occupant to face any direction, and they all faced their host. Elyse managed to say, in halting Ellan phrases: "I am sure we do not blame you for the omission. We are very anxious to know who you are, and if you have been able to acquire our ships as well."

He leaned back in the chair, to

examine a set of papers handed him by a similarly garbed young man who came from the forward part of the ship, spoke several swift words in a tongue they did not understand. Then he turned again to them. "I am a rebellious peer of this ancient empire. By birth I inherited the overlordship of a prosperous planet from my father. But as my father died before I reached the legal age to inherit, it was taken from me by some legal fol-de-rol and given to a favorite of the Empress, a wastrel fop of the court who is not even of our own race. Since that day I have fought, with every means to my hand, to bring about the downfall of the ruling house. Naturally your coming was reported to me, in fact quite a while before you arrived we expected you. I had hoped you would arrive under your own power and give these tyrants cause to regret your arrival."

Mion and Tyron both asked in a chorus: "How did you know before we came?"

"A ship of the Empire's trading fleet came in some days ago, reporting they had been pursued by two strange warcraft. Aboard were a number of slaves from beyond the Barrier. My spies got into communication with the slaves, and we learned from them your probable identity. Naturally I appreciated the possibilities far more than our somewhat thickheaded Emperor and his mate. Imagine making common slaves out of an expedition bringing to us what you bring! It was the height of stupidity! But in a way I am glad, as their foolishness creates my opportunity."

Tyron growled in Nortan: "This prince sounds like a man of our kind, Chief. Ask for telaug conference, and stop wasting time with this oral stumbling about."

But Mion was not listening. His face aglow with hope, he almost shouted: "Man, tell me of those slaves! Is one of them an Atlan? No, you wouldn't understand. Was one of them a woman large as myself, but with hooves and a long white tail . . . what we call a variform?"

Elyse, noting the strange Chieftain's confusion as Mion's excited voice stumbled over the Ellan words, explained: "Please tell us, strange leader, for we came all this way only to find those slaves. Was one of them a woman large as Mion, beautiful as a Goddess, yet with hooves instead of feet?"

"She is the reason for your venture into this star cluster? You knew where you were going? Yes, my voyagers, there was such a one among them, for she was my informant. There were others talked to my spies, but. . .

Mion interrupted him. "Can you tell me where she is? How to . . ." as the situation cleared in his mind, Mion fell silent, his eyes burning upon the stranger leader in hypnotic intensity.

Quite irrelevantly, the dark eyed chief asked: "How old are you?" His eyes burned back into Mion's with an almost equal intensity of query.

Mion shook his head, the question

maddening in its sudden misdirection. But automatically he answered: "Some eighteen centuries of our Earth years, and nine Nortan orbits, if you use that system of time recording. Meaningless figures to you, of course. I do not know the Ellan calendar or time arithmetic." (arithmentic—correct Elder.)

"The telaug, Mion. Get him to use the telaug!" Tyron was impatient of this snarl of cross-purposes and misunderstood meanings. But Mion turned on him. "He probably doesn't even have the telaug to use! You're of equal rank with me, now! Ask him yourself."

Tyron suddenly grinned. "We're both ex-slaves, and I don't have to salute?"

Saphele murmured in his ear. "In an Imperial Police State, or slave empire, the telaug would naturally be monopolized by the military, denied to the general populace. It may even be secret here! He may even not know it exists."

"He could hardly have remained at liberty as he says he has, in constant struggle with the Imperial forces, if they held such an advantage . . ." mused Tyron, his eyes on the strange rescuer, but his ears listening to Saphele. Both spoke Nortan, which was but little different from the Mantong used universally in space where the League ruled.

The dark eyed leader, who had listened to the interchange with a puzzled expression, broke into the silence that fell among them. "I had better explain some things. My name is Ras Maneon, but my people's name for me is Neran, which in our tongue means princeling. It is thus they will call me until we free our people from the Imperial tyrants, when I hope they will call me Dom Ras, or Ruler. I heard you use the word telaug. It is known to us, and we have acquired a few from Imperial craft we shot down. But the one on this ship is at present in use as a detector coupled to an ionizing ray fanning out along our back trail. You see why I need you so desperately, technically the Imperial forces are our superiors, and eventually this weakness would prove our downfall."

Mion nodded, and fell into a brooding silence, there was for him nothing that could eclipse the nearness of Arl, and the seeming impossibility of reaching her. Again he had almost come into contact . . . and now again space was widening between them.

THE base of Ras Maneon proved to be a lush little jungle planet, and he explained as the ship came smoothly to a landing beneath sheltering trees: "This place is supposed to be uninhabited, but we have changed that of recent years. Too, it's supposed to be uninhabitable. for reason of its eccentric orbit. It plunges from extreme frigidity to exhausting heat with dizzying frequence. But our sealed caverns cause this to be a minor inconvenience.

"Don't the Ellans construct caverns beneath their cities?" asked

Elyse, who was taken with Ras Maneon's sleek and virile good looks, Mion noted with some amusement. The Peirans' open pursuit of unattached males always seemed to him both pathetic and comical, though in truth it was neither. It was a frankness, a naturalness springing from their life in a manless society, where women's wiles did not develop the artifice of concealment.

"Not as a rule," he answered absently, watching as the hillside opened before them and they glided into the cool dimness of his hideout. "They have been too fortunate to realize the need for them."

It was evident to the Nortans that Ras Maneon realized the need, for the little world was honeycombed with his borings, and in every one was bustling activity. Shops were turning out engines and weapons, assembly lines rolled ceaselessly, the whole shell of the planet had been made into a factory. The end product of the ceaseless industry was a shining craft which rolled off the lines one every hour. Mion and his Nortans spent hours going over these warcraft with Maneon. He had several captured Ellan craft of varied types with which to compare his own product, and the Nortans checked to see just how this Princeling expected to defeat a power thousands of times stronger. His craft were better engined, would prove to have greater speed and better maneuverability. They were not heavier weaponed, though each of them carried at least one long-range ray, a super weapon which Maneon was sure would outrange the usual battle equipment of the Ellan craft. But the ex-ruler explained: "I don't expect to defeat the Ellan war-power in any single engagement. I mean only to harass them, to break down the legend of their invincibility until some other power sees the light and turns against them."

Mion grumbled to Tyron in Nortan: "If he'd had the sense to rescue our ships instead of our persons he'd have had a better chance. But let's set to work and see what we can devise for him . . . we should be able to improvise a weapon or two that the Ellans won't be able to match."

Although Ras Maneon had not understood Mion, their minds were running in the same channel, for he said: "We made an attempt to capture your two ships, but they were heavily guarded. I lost a ship . . . and some of my best men."

"Before you came for us?" asked Tyron. "Odd they didn't expect you, then?"

Ras shook his head. "Not before. There were three craft in the raid. I came for you, figuring you people were the more important. The other two made a try for the ships, and failed. We struck simultaneously."

"If we've got to fight against our own ships, we've a tough time ahead." Mion's brow was furrowed—one could not duplicate the craftsmanship developed in thousands of years in the machine shops of Nor. How to devise any makeshifts overnight

which would prove equal to the weapons on the *Darkome?* He turned to Ras Maneon. "How can you expect to overcome the Ellan fleets without our ships? We could never duplicate those weapons except with many years of labor and study and all the effort of all your shops here."

The princeling nodded understanding, but smiled. "I never expect to overcome the Ellan warfleet. I expect only to expose their stupidity to those who will overcome them. I would never try to meet them in battle."

"Which will accomplish nothing unless such powers exist, waiting only an opportunity to attack. That could drag on for a century. We have immediate problems. We must have our own ships for return to our own people. We must release Arl of Atlan from Ellan slavery. We cannot amuse ourselves plaguing these Ellan patrols, as you seem to expect." Mion was puzzled, just what was Maneon's plan?

"I will show you how I expect to release your friend, and I will make other attempts to recapture your craft. Certainly you are in a better position with me than you were in a slave pen!"

But Mion took his hand, shook it heartily. "You misunderstand, man, I am not ungrateful! I am trying to grasp the plan of action in your mind, and how we can fit our special aptitudes into that plan."

Ras Maneon flushed with sudden emotion. "It is good to know you are with us. Your knowledge should give us strange new powers. Now I suspect you must adjust yourselves to new hazards. You have been long dependent upon your great weapons, developed by your forebears. Now you must depend upon your wits wholly, against a more powerful enemy, one better equipped and more numerous. You can only survive by out-thinking the Ellan lords. You can do it, but you must realize the necessity."

Tyron slapped Mion's broad back, laughing. "There's the truth in your face, Chief! It's time you learned to face peril without an armada, without even your own invincible *Darkome*. Now it's your wits against a great empire! Lets see what's in you!"

Mion smiled, and sat down abruptly at a work bench in the long shop-cavern they were traversing. "I must immediately evolve some plan which will give us superiority over these Ellan craft, at least in speed, preferably in range of fire. All right, leave me alone here with these engineers and mechanics, and go and do likewise, Tyron, find a telaug so I can discuss the work with these craftsmen. Then occupy yourself and let me alone. Thinking requires isolation . . ."

ARL of Atlan, seated in the walled garden of the estate of Man-Kun, Lord of Hafnir, Count of Ralder, and several other titles . . . was engaged in constructing a toy for the children of Lord Man-Kun. There were three boys, and a girl much younger, only three. The boys ranged

from seven (Earth) years of age to twelve. Because of her size and reputed wisdom, Man-Kun had made Arl slave governess of his children. After her purchase she had very little contact with the Ellan people—Man-Kun did not wish to lose this treasure. For she had taught his children many things unknown to others, and he himself had profited by her lessons, unknown to her. For Arl, compared to the Ellans, was a scientist and technician far beyond anything their race could produce. And her long years of intensive study of the minds of others with the telaug had given her an insight into the ways of thought that made her able to read every thought in the children's minds, and answer their questions even when they were unspoken.

Little Tarni, the nine-year-old, had asked her how ships were made to fly in the air. For answer she had constructed a simple glider, the day before. The boys had had great fun launching it and watching it soar and swoop and glide about the big garden. Today she meant to put a motor in it of some kind, and was busy with the task, while the children romped beside her.

For the motor she had put together several simple chemicals in a small bottle of metal, fitted it with a tiny escape hole, and attached it to the underbody of the simple glider of wood. Now ready, she explained:

"The gas generated in the little bottle will rush out of this little hole, trying to get away. The little plane will go the other way, because the gas must push equally in all direction, but the little hole of escape causes this pressure of escape to be more on one side than the escape side. As the plane moves away it pushes its slanted wings against the air, which rushes under, and the air the wings displace makes a vacuum above the wing, which pulls the light plane up. Do you understand why it flies?"

Tarni, the precocious one, cried: "I think I understand, Mother Arl. But it is so many things pushing so many ways . . ."

Arl smiled. "Yes, little one, there are several forces in action to cause the flight. But if you study its flight and ask me questions, you will soon understand why it flies."

She released the tiny stopper of the bottle, and the tiny plane took off, circling higher and higher, finally flying off over the garden wall and across the nearby palace grounds. Tarni and his brother Gran scrambled up on the backs of the benches against the wall to peer over the wall after the plane's flight.

"It's going away, Mother Arl! Get it back, get it back!"

Arl stood up, her height many times that of the children. She was the tallest human creature in all Helios. And she saw a comic sight—several full grown people dodging and running to escape the erratic circling of the tiny plane. Their fear and cries were comical, for the light plane could have hurt no one, and Arl laughed in her giant's voice. Sweet and womanly though it was, still to

the Ellans her voice was far too powerful to be accepted as normal. She called out as the plane came to rest, tangled in one of the women's elaborately dressed hair. "Bring the toy back, please! It is harmless!"

Still chuckling she reached one long beautiful arm over the wall, and Tarni and Gran shrilled in chorus: "Bring it back! Bring back our airplane!"

But the woman in whose hair the little toy was entangled snatched it from her tresses and flung it to the ground, crushing it there with one foot. Arl, herself angered by the despicable act, cried: "In Nor we would have you placed under surveillance for such an act! One capable of destroying a child's toy is capable of murder or worse."

Arl had never seen the Empress, nor any of the sycophants of the court. Man-Kun had kept her carefully shielded from such contact. It was but this accident of the Empress inspecting the gardens that had brought her to the out of the way corner of the palace grounds bordering Man-Kun's estate. It was Arl's misfortune thus to meet the Empress. and to insult her face to face. She gave orders at once . . . "Take this slave to the dungeons! We cannot have any slave speak thus to any Ellan, let alone to the Empress!"

So it was the sons of Man-kun lost their governess, and the foolish rulers made one more powerful enemy. For Lord Man-kun was not one to have his slaves confiscated without a murmur, and of this giantess Arl he had been enamoured, as were all who knew her.

Lying in her dungeon, which was far too small for her, Arl spent many days of solitude, thinking and growing more and more angry. With her, raw anger was a novelty, at first. But after many days, her nature settled down to a contemplative fury against these insensitive and foolish rulers who were making of the rich Ellan empire so much less than it could be. From her fury many plans arose, revolved in her powerful mind, were set aside out of respect for the sheer impossibility of one woman, however capable, conquering an Empire. And out of them all arose one simple plan, based upon her knowledge of the secrets of life unknown to her captors.

Now, Arl of Atlan was a long time student of the schools of Nor, and especially of those taught by Vanue, the Elder Princess of Nor. Vanue's special field was the growth of tiny creatures. Intelligent micro-races had been the means of her deliverance from the mind destroying micro-race brought to Nor by the Jotuns. And within Arl still lived some of the intelligent micro-races planted there by the scientists of Enn.

Arl knew these races could breed at a spectacular rate if they so desired. Ordinarily they held their numbers to a minimum, out of respect for their host. Now she took council with these tiny intelligent creatures within her own flesh, and together they planned a conquest of the Ellan people. To this end Arl starved herself,

out of the insufficient food brought to her, to leave within a hidden receptacle in her cell a fluid mixture of nutrients within which the micro race could breed vast numbers of new descendants.

To alter the genes of heredity within the fertilized cell was a thing done by the variform technique for an age. But to attack this problem with the help of a microscopic race able to enter the egg cell themselves had, so far as she knew, never been attempted. It occurred to her that here, in this field of contrived mutation which had produced the variform races of the far past, might lie a method which could give her freedom as well as power over her oppressors. So with long nights and longer days to herself, Arl lay in her damp cell of rock walls and designed for the micro race a beginning. A cell was taken from some of the mold spores growing on the walls, other cells from the tiny animals swimming in the water that trickled along the damp rocks, and within them the micro race experimented, producing many strange things before they at last presented Arl with their finished product, a seed which had only to be planted in good soil to produce doom for the Ellan autocracy.

Arl lay considering this seed, which she held in her hand. Some way it must be conveyed to the palace gardens above her. If only she were allowed visitors! But she never saw any human being but the deaf and half-blind creature who brought her food, sliding it through an opening in the door. But such difficulties, she knew, needed only thought to be overcome. And that night some of her tiny invisible servitors took over the mind of a mouse, guiding it beneath her door, and taking the seed from her sleeping hand. The mouse ran out beneath the door, with the micromen guiding it from inside its nerve cords, the neurons of its tiny mind, inside the very muscles of its legs. Up the long flights of stone stairs, and out into the night, through the cropped grass, to the rich beds where the flowers were grown that graced the chambers of the Empress every day. There the mouse planted the seed, and was released by its invisible riders. These remained in the soil about the seed to safeguard its beginning growth.

DAYS passed, and there sprang up in the gardens of the Empress a remarkable plant. Like no other plant, it grew at a furious rate, like the mold spores which were its parents, several times removed. Almost before the gardeners noticed the graceful new "tree" in the gardens, it was dropping brilliant flower petals from about its spore pods. But the spore pods kept on growing, seeming not to ripen. And within the pods some strange thing moved, and turned, swaying the growing branches of the graceful tree that was like a great grey fern.

The tiny people reported to Arl within her mind, going and coming as they set the stage for the coming events that would turn Ellan into . . .

something far different. And the great fern tree grew, a growth whose rate increased day by day, so that not a month after Arl and her little servants created the seed, it towered far above the palace of the Emperor, dwarfing everything else in that part of the city . . . and having become the curiosity, the landmark, and the special pride of the Emperor himself.

Then one of the curiously moving, irregularly shaped spore pods opened, in the night. Something came out of the pod, and drifted off on the air, wings moving gently, gently.

After that for many nights the air was thick with the little flying things leaving their mother tree, and where they went or what they did there was no one to notice. But Arl knew, as did her tiny servitors. Millions of the living things were born by that tree, and the city of Helios and all the land around was sown thick with . . . the strange seeds of the strange plant that Arl had created from nothing but mold.

A week later the strange spores had produced seedlings. Everywhere the eyes of the Ellan turned, the strange grey fernlike trees that were not trees grew, pavings cracked and were thrust aside, walls fell as the roots pierced the foundations and burst them. Two weeks later nothing could be seen of Helios from above but the weird grey growth, so like mold, but a mold vastly more fit for survival and strangely avid for sunlight and clean soil. What Arl had created was the perfect plant, a plant designed to supersede all other plants in size and ferocity of plant appetite. The farming of the Ellans came to a stop as the first wave of new spores wafted outward from Helios and took root everywhere the land would support a root.

Revolt flared in Helios as the food distribution broke down for lack of farm produce. Hungry people raided the storehouses, to be repulsed by the Imperial troops who realized only too well that the storehouses contained the only available food on the planet. The space fleet was busy ferrying in food but the quantity was insufficient—a crumb upon the desert of the Ellan starvation. In her cell, Arl of Atlan knew that now she must speak or starve herself.

So it was that the Empress of Helios heard from the gigantic captive slave whom she had all but forgotten. Handed up from dumb slave to guard to gold helmeted Imperial guard officers came Arl's simple message. "Arl of Atlan brought this plague upon you, and only Arl of Atlan can take the plague away again."

THE Empress ordered the gigantic prisoner hailed before her, for there was no place for pride or cruelty now. She was in imminent danger of losing her life in one or another of the uprisings that flared continually against the palace walls. The trees of gray and weird growth now towered impossibly above the palace. The strange writhing winged spores were a constant rain upon all the city streets. People could not walk, for

everywhere they trod were the weird wriggling things, moving about like strange animals until they found a bit of soil into which to thrust avid new roots, there to begin their ultra rapid rearing upward of the beautiful plumes of gray foliage. That first plant was now a vast tower of strength, half a mile high, a fantastic thing of incredible vigor and beauty.

Arl moved through the shadowed, gloomy edifice that had become as dark and ominous as an ancient necropolis under its shroud of gray foliage. Through the windows could be seen only rank upon rank of the impossibly huge boles of the strange fierce plant growth, and cracks were appearing everywhere in the strong palace walls. Within days it would be uninhabitable as the walls crumbled from the powerful force of the thrusting roots beneath. Arl moved along between her blond, lean-faced guards, a goddess in chains led by dwarves in gold and black uniforms. They led her before the two thrones in the great audience chamber, where were gathered now those still loyal to the Emperor. They were not many, for nearly all the richer citizens of Helios had fled from the spreading blight of the gray trees, fled to the still untouched lands beyond the oceans. Arl stood and faced this crew of tottering nobility, and she did not wait for their questions or their recognition of her identity. As soon as her guards halted before the throne, she stepped out from among them and held up her manacled wrists and long beautiful hands to the two worried creatures upon the two thrones.

"Listen to me, you who usurp the power given you by your people to spread slavery and unfair domination everywhere your warships reach. I accepted my slavery and capture at your hands, at first, because I thought you were ignorant rather than evil or cruel. But when you cast me into a cell of darkness and slime, then I struck back. I created the seed of this gray mold tree that has taken over all of your arable soil. I can create the spore of the fungi that will attack this tree and destroy it utterly, but I will do so only after you accede to my demands. I came to you bearing wisdom from beyond the Barrier, and you made of me a menial in your house. Now I come to you bearing freedom from the curse I set upon you. Will you do as I ask? Or must I leave you to your fate? I have no hatred for your people. I have evened my score with you who rule, and I would not hurt the little people more than I have. I would make amends to them for what you have forced me to do."

Her voice was a great ringing sound of truth in that court of stricken great. In that palace of doomed rulers it rang out like the voice of an avenging Goddess, which is precisely what it was. The Emperor and the Empress — his face dark and lined with weariness, hers flushed and nervously twitching with strain—looked at each other and at the courtiers grouped about the thrones, but none of them at first had any word to

say. Then the Emperor realized that no one there was any better prepared to answer this strange ringing speech from their giant prisoner than himself, and his voice sounded after hers like the voice of an infant, a weak and foolish child questioning his teacher. "You say you created this awful plant that has seized upon our life and broken it? How can we know you speak truth? Why should we listen to you any more than the hundred and one plant specialists we have called upon for help? None of them had any solution!"

"Saw you ever such a plant before?" asked Arl, her eyes fixing the Emperor's gaze until he dropped his eyes before her own, as he shook his head. "And did you ever see a woman of my size before?" asked Arl, and again the ruler twisted his eyes up to hers and failed to find the strength to meet her gaze.

"No," managed the man, his voice strangely weak in the shadowed courtroom. "No, never such a giant creature, except our own guardians of the watcher domes upon our borders in space. And no man knows when they were created, or what they really are. Legend has it they were here when the Ellans came to these worlds, few and hermitlike in their wild solitudes, fierce but easily conquered because of their lone habits of life. But what does that prove? Nothing but that you come of some giant race on some far world."

"You know better, but you fear to admit the truth. I have lived for many of your lifetimes, for beyond the Barrier our peoples have conquered age and death. Once I was of normal size like yourselves. But age without decay brings steady growth. So I am a giantess, in body as well as in mind. Only I could have created this tree that has conquered you all without striking a blow. I must have your recognition of that truth. Only I can free you, and you must realize that. And I will not do so until you abdicate, and cause to be set up a government based upon equal opportunity for all. The slaves must be freed in all Ellas! Then I will free you of your curse of trees. When you are ready for me to go to work, let me know. Until then, I will return to the cell you have given me under your palace. I like it better than your company."

Arl turned away, and walked toward the door by which she had entered. The captain of the half dozen guards who had led her sprang to bar her path, but suddenly the fear of her struck him. He grasped the fact that here was a powerful being who had set a nation upside down with the mere creation of a plant mutation! It occurred to him that it might be wise to recognize that the butter on his bread might not still proceed only from the ruler's favor, which had suddenly become worthless in his eyes. So he stood aside as Arl neared him, his eyes on her stern beautiful face, and his heart in his breast hammering to some strange inspiring loyalty such as he had never felt before. Here, his mind insisted on reminding him, was the sort of

being a man could follow with pride!

No one else moved to bar her exit, and behind her she heard a sudden chitter of whispering talk, pitched too low for her to hear. And one voice above all she heard exclaiming: "In spite of all, I believe her! We must try to satisfy her!"

But Arl knew human nature too well to expect any understanding or compliance from those two on the throne. Even if they had promised obedience to her every wish, she would not have trusted them. She returned to her cell voluntarily to await the development of resistance to those two. She knew they would refuse, and she knew that everyone else, with nothing to lose and everything to gain, would plot against the throne. Within days, perhaps within short hours, she knew those two would find themselves either dead or set aside in exile. She knew that those who would seize the power would promise to release the slaves, to get her to overcome the fiercely growing army of trees. And she cynically suspected that the freedom the slaves would enjoy would be short lived once the menace of the trees was gone.

But what might have happened under the set of circumstances she had contrived to overthrow those who had imprisoned her, she was never to learn. That same night, she heard overhead the drone and zoom of warring ships, felt the shock of bombs and rockets exploding. Someone was attacking! The weakened power of Ellas must fall! If only. . .

* * *

ON Ras Maneon's hideout world the news of the strange gray tide of growth overspreading the streets of Helios was received at first with disbelief. But as refugees from the abandoned plantations and estates of the rich nobles of Helios began to be common sights in every city still untouched by the plague of giant trees, they realized something of what was occurring in the center of Ellan power. A council of war was called, and for the first time in many weeks Mion and Tyron left the workshops of Ras Maneon and donned formal military uniforms. As Ras Maneon urged an immediate general attack upon Helios itself, Mion demurred. "We're not ready, Prince! I don't care what state the city is in, it doesn't impair the Ellan war strength! Until and unless some of those leaders of their fleet units rebel and desert, we cannot attack openly!"

Ras Maneon leaped to his feet, flushed and angry. "I have positive reports, assurance that rebellion awaits only our appearance to explode even among the Imperial fleet itself. They're on short rations, man. It's hitting them in the stomach already! We'll never find a better time to strike."

Tyron, sitting moodily watching the debate, suddenly slammed a fist to the table to get attention. "I say we don't know what we're doing if we attack now, Ras! What is this

plague of trees? What is it going to do? Won't it finish our battle for us, as it has begun it?"

Maneon turned to Tyron, furious to hear caution counciled when he had waited and worked for so many years for this moment. "The two who came so far to rescue a lady pick a strange time to get knocking knees! This from you Nor-warriors I did not expect! Can I believe my ears?"

Tyron smiled at his vehemence. "Spitfire that you are, Ras Maneon," said Tyron, laughing gently, "you should remember you are talking to veterans not of one or two wars, but of fifty. Wars are not won by generals who rush into every encounter because things look favorable. Sure, we can attack Helios now that she's crippled and her people are leaving her. But even if we win and invest Helios with our army, what have we won? If it is valueless to its own citizens, what do we want with it? What assurance have we the Emperor and his court aren't already settling on some other planet far from this plague that has seized his principal planet?"

"They are there! My spies assure they cower within their palace, watching the terrible trees reach upward and upward every day about them, afraid to go out for fear their own people will kill them! They are afraid of their own fleet! Because somehow the slaves have spread the word that the plague of trees was caused by some strange genius they imprisoned, and this scientist has offered to free Helios of the trees if the Emperor abdicates."

"That's different!" Mion was watching Maneon with furrowed brows, his mind far away. "That imprisoned genius they mention wouldn't be Arl of Atlan? Who else, now that I think of it, could have invented the gray trees of death but Arl, whose specialty was always such work under Vanue? She has created many new species in the laboratory. It would perhaps be not too difficult for her to do so *without* a laboratory."

Tyron slapped his hands together, his face lighting with the thought of Arl turning the tables on the Ellans with a simple plant mutation. "You've hit it! That's Arl's work, and she must have been in desperate straits, for she would never have hurt the little people of Ellas unless forced into it. Perhaps they are not hurt as much as we suppose! Perhaps she knows the tree is edible, if anyone attempts to use it for food. It would be like her to play such a joke upon them all."

So the decision of attack was made. Near midnight, the fleet of Ras Maneon fell soundlessly down from the stratosphere, without lights, their anti-grav units the only moving machinery aboard. They met no resistance, until they swept over the city itself, the immense trees almost entirely obscuring the buildings from above. Only then did the Ellan warcraft emerge, blasting up from the three main fields of the city, straight up into the destroying rays they could not maneuver to escape. In

those first furious seconds as they wheeled and dived upon the Ellan warcraft flaming up through the enshrouding trees a good half the Ellan strength was destroyed.

Still the advantage of numbers lay with the Ellan warfleet. Fully as many escaped the first encounter as were destroyed. But Maneon did not stay to meet them in a duel where he had no advantage. The invading fleet sped on and up, away from the city, the surviving Ellan craft in hot pursuit. Mion and Tyron, each in command of one powerful little fighting craft of twenty guns and thirty men, wondered at Maneon's abandonment of the battle almost before it was started. But they followed, and as the rebel fleet reached the limits of the atmosphere, and went into space drive, they left the still ascending Ellan craft far behind in the atmosphere.

Then Maneon's tactic became clear. He sent a half-dozen of his smallest ships on to lay a trail for the pursuit to follow, and the rest spun in a wide circle that yet put half the pilots into unconsciousness with the vicious pressure of the centrifugal force. As the pursuit swept on past on the ion trail left by the half-dozen fleeing ships, Maneon's little fleet was already again in free fall, their descent slowed only slightly by the antigravs as they fell into the atmosphere that concealed their presence from the fleet speeding on the false trail overhead.

Minutes later they swept down upon Helios once again, landing impudently upon the same fields so recently used by the Ellans for their take-off. Within a quarter of an hour every important stronghold in the city was in their hands. If and when the Ellan garrison returned to the city they would find a warm reception in their own home port.

Then began the siege of the Imperial Palace itself. Maneon was sure that if they captured or killed the Emperor, resistance would disappear and a new regime would appear. Perhaps one of their own number could be caused to be accepted by the nobles and rich merchants as an emergency ruler, until a council could be held to select the one most acceptable. But the Palace had to be taken, and that shortly. The far-flung space garrisons and inumerable military patrol ships of the immense Ellan Empire could annihilate them if they were allowed time. They must win decisively within hours, or all would be lost.

The siege of the Palace was undertaken with a joint attack from the air and along the streets that ended against the Palace walls. The Palace was the center of the city—the streets went out from it like spokes from a wheel. But the financial and trade centers of the city lay far out on the northern segment of the wheel.

Maneon took time only for the slaves who had been waiting for the word to arise, a movement he knew would grow like a snowball rolling down hill as the revolt spread. He gave them some two hundred trained officers for leaders, left the ground

attack to them, and set about making a landing within the palace grounds.

Below lay the Palace, dwarfed by the gigantic gray mold-trees, only distinguishable by the lighted windows. There was no sign of a guard or a defense, and one by one Maneon's little fighting craft dropped through the trees, lighting soundlessly on the lawns, near the walls. Maneon sent a squad of ten on the double to throw open the gates as they circled, knowing the advancing slave mobs would be beneath the walls in minutes. Leaving only two men in each ship, the rest advanced upon the palace on foot, carrying ray-rifles and side-arms, grenades and the deadly flame-cutters which doubled for weapons or to burn down any metal barriers. The main doors were closed, and beyond must wait the main force of the palace guard. A thermite bomb was placed against the heavy double valve, and as it burst into terrible brilliance, the rifles were leveled to burn down the first who opened those doors. But no one swung back the huge metal valves to learn what caused the terrible light, and in three minutes the great gates were white hot at the center, cherry red at the perimeters. A ram would have burst them open then, but there was no ram available. Tyron picked up a huge boulder from a flower mound nearby, heaved it against the center of the doors. They gave slightly, bowing inward, and Tyron picked it up again, pressed it against the doors with his shoulder, and thrust. Still they held, until Mion added his strength to Tyron's, thrusting against the boulder by his side. With a groan the bars gave, softened by the heat. The doors swung open. Tyron dropped to the ground as Mion sprang aside into the darkness, expecting a volley of flaming rays from inside. But only silence awaited the storming party, and cautiously they advanced, expecting every second to meet attack from the dark corridors beyond.

When it came, it well nigh finished Ras Maneon's ambition in one stroke. As they left the entrance corridor, to enter a chamber where four halls led to the separate wings of the huge pile, the hiss and splat of ray fire flamed suddenly from barricades across the entries to the four corridors. The guards had chosen their position well, for there was no turning back, knowing the trap had closed. The grenades saved the day, blasting apart the hasty barricades behind which the guards sheltered, putting the fighting on equal terms. For ten terrible flaming minutes men stood and fired point blank at each other, and when the firing died away, there were still standing out a dozen men about that dim chamber.

Ras Maneon, bleeding and his uniform scorched into a ragged masquerade, shouted: "Into the throne room; if I know that ruler of ours, he's cowering behind the throne right now, too stupid to conceive of an escape."

The last defenders of the barricades had retreated back up the corridors, and Tyron, supporting

Maneon with one great arm, limped slowly along the passage Maneon chose. Mion turned back to check on the fate of the troops who had been posted at the main entry, for if the guards rallied in the throne room, the few left alive of their original storming party would prove inadequate.

A shambles was all that he found at the warped and dangling valves of the main entry, guards and Maneon's insurgents lay tumbled over each other in death. Whether any had survived, or what had happened he could only guess. But from across the wide lawns streamed hordes of slaves, carrying weapons of all kinds, from bread knives to billets of wood to first class ray rifles taken from fallen guards. Mion greeted these with an upraised hand, his poorly pronounced Ellan tongue explaining to them what had occurred. There was little he could do but stand aside and tell them to clean out the palace, hunt down the last of the guards, and then to await orders. He was injured himself, rays had criss-crossed his massive figure in several places, but without hitting a vital spot. He was in agony from the ray-burns, superficial though they were, and limped off in the wake of the yelling slaves to be on hand in the throne room where Maneon expected to find his hated ruler waiting his revenge.

The scene there was pitiful, for Ras Maneon had found his quarry gone. It seemed there had been no one in the palace but a hundred or so of the regular guard. Maneon sat upon the empty throne, almost in tears. Mion shouted: "There's no time for that, Ras! Give your orders to these slaves who have risked everything to aid you, and let's get about the next step in this revolution before it turns cold in your hands."

But what they might have done to retrieve the aborted coup Mion was not to learn. As he strode up the four wide steps to the throne dais, a vibrant cry reached his ears: "My Mutan! How long I have waited for this moment!"

Mion swung about, to see emerge from the dark shadows of the palace corridor the tall lovely form of Arl, her gown in rags but her beautiful face wreathed in a smile such as men hope to find only in Heaven. The two pressed through the crowd, those last steps in their seeking seeming longer than any steps should be, these last barriers between them moving aside as the slaves made way for their tall forms with awed faces, to see these superior giant people meet thus in love was a sight to strike awe into any mortal. They rushed thus into each other's arms across the great wrecked chamber, and their meeting seemed to the onlookers to give forth audible music, a kind of supernal rhythm of mighty life-meaning, their words in the Nortan tongue a mysterious chant to the poor slaves.

Mion and Arl stood for many long minutes in close embrace, while every excited voice in that pressing mob stilled, and all stood and watched, knowing that they were

privileged to witness something beyond the power of words or the ordinary minds of men to understand or ever tell about afterward.

AS Mion at last released her from that embrace, Arl whispered softly: "The *Darkome* waits where they set her down at the port. They tried to use her, found the protective mental-lock devices had detected the change of masters. They could not understand the lock, or use the drive. They had no experience with the intricacies of Nortan science."

"That means we can go home, Arl!" Mion pressed her again to his breast, and their two minds communed together in that deep bliss that only telepathic union can give. In that exchange of their deepest thought, each realized the other's hope of returning at last to their asteroid home, Mandark.

"My heart cries home, too," murmured Arl. Within Mion was occurring a swift loosening, a thawing. He saw suddenly that his indecision and strangeness was caused by the absence of Arl. Now, suddenly, he knew himself as a man longing for home even as he searched the stars, and here in his arms was the very essence of home for him. "I am weary, Arl. I had despaired of finding you. Had I not found you, I would never have returned. I considered many another path than the one toward Nor. Now, I know our place is back on Mandark where we have built our steading, and where all our work lies waiting for us to complete it."

Tyron, who had stood all this while with a beaming face waiting to greet again his dear friend Arl of Atlan, at last broke in. "Could you in your new happiness spare a friend a word?" he asked, humbly.

Arl, contrite, released herself from Mion's arms, took both Tyron's hands in his own, and kissed his ruddy cheeks. "It is so good, Tyron, so good to see your broad hearty face again."

Tyron, abashed, rumbled in his chest but could not say anything intelligible orally. His thoughts were quite open to Arl, though, and were sufficiently coherent to cause them both to laugh happily at his overflowing emotions. At last he managed: "I know there'll be no keeping you two on this side the Barrier. Nor holding you back from returning, now. But I am staying with my Peiran friends, perhaps forever. I pray you will not forget us, you will return to us soon . . ."

Beside him, Saphele added her voice: "You must not let this sudden nostalgia blind you to what this side holds for you. You must not decide so suddenly! For the Peirans will certainly close the passage. Even now, they may have destroyed the twin planets to prevent the League from following their flight."

Tyron, putting his arm about Saphele with clumsy tenderness, rumbled on: "Arl, I hate to tell you, but you really can't go back! They must not know, back there. Only Vanue knows we went through the Barrier. We've got to protect the Peirans' secret. Even if they destroyed the

passage, and you were living among the Nortans. eventually the telaug would pick the method from your thoughts. The Barrier would be solved by the technicians of the league. Let them think nothing lies behind the Barrier, forever. Let this side of the Barrier build its own future. You can't go back. You carry our future in your knowledge. The Nortan watchers would see it in your mind."

Mion took Arl's hands in his own. his eyes on hers with a call to courage burning in them. "He's right, Arl. We owe it to these friends not to lead the League to them again. We must build a new Mandark, a new way of life."

Arl's eyes darkened for a long moment as she considered, then suddenly she laughed. "Oh, Mutan, home is where you are, and here all space beckons, new and untouched . . . I really like the prospect!"

Saphele, laughing with swift gratitude, put her arms about Arl's waist. looking up to the face so far above her own. "You'll not be sorry you chose this side. Think of what we can make of life with a new beginning!"

Mion, grateful too, to see Arl accept the situation, mentally agreed with Saphele. A new beginning, with all the old mistakes behind. That was good.

And then Arl, looking deep into Mion's mind, said: "So! I see that I have been away from you long enough! So you have been selected to father the new race of Peirans, eh? A new beginning, eh?"

Mutan Mion, caught red-handed with the unguarded thought in his mind, quailed before her anger, but then he gazed at her in wonder as she suddenly smiled sweetly.

"It will be great fun!" she exclaimed. "But not exactly in the way you have envisioned! Perhaps it would be more correct to call me the *mother* of the new race! At last I will have a chance to use my microscience as I have long wanted. And who more fitted to seed a new test-tube race than my beloved *husband?*"

Mutan caught the emphasis she placed on the last word and suddenly grinned too.

"Why whatever other way did you think I meant?" he asked.

Arl looked at him knowingly.

"You men are such simple knuckheads, and such poor liars. But what would we women do if you were not!"

THE END

Just a group of science-fiction writers and editors who met socially once a week. Nothing unusual in that, lots of science-fictionists have similar meetings all over the country — but maybe most meetings don't turn out like this particular one.

DISGUISE

By Donald A. Wollheim

Illustration by Bill Terry

WE called it Borderland House, because it was a title that tickled our imaginations and because in a way we were all men who made our living by digging and delving along the borderlands of science. Specifically, we were science fiction fans.

We had met as boys years ago: ten, twelve, some even twenty years before. We had formed clubs, written enthusiastic letters to magazines feuded, and mimeographed fan journals. Then we tried writing stories for the three existing science-fiction magazines and one of us cracked Gernsback, and another sold something to T. O'Conor Sloane, and finally most of us sold a few. As the years went by, we matured, found our places in the world. We married, some of us were still happy with our first wives others were already divorced three times. We were getting a bit grey one was balding, others remained surprisingly youthful.

Before we had realized it, we were the editors, the professional writers. We no longer corresponded with fans out of town. Some of us avoided conventions, some of us even poohpoohed that which had been the making of us all. Basically, we were still fans. And we liked to gather on an evening to chew the fat, to argue the doings of the world, cuss out publishers, tear other writers to pieces, and maybe unravel dianetics or the latest high-jink of the *stf* world

One of us had made a lot of money and had bought a house in the suburbs with his former wife. Now his wife had left him, but he still had the house, and we all got together and made it a special hangout. A club for professional science-fictionists. It was a lovely little place, a sort of ranch-house type, with a wonderful picture-window living room, looking down the hill. The location was sufficiently suburban for it to be surrounded by greenery. We could see the road at the base of the hill, along which the bus passes. We had a view of the winding path leading up to our door, and when we sat by the huge wall-length window, we could watch our visitors coming.

IT was a summer evening, on a Friday night, and most of us were already gathered there. Friday night is the end of a work week, and married or not, our wives knew we liked to make it our own night. So there were five of us sitting around the living room of Borderland House, cocktail glasses in hand or on the table, some of us smoking, and talking science-fiction.

Fred was sitting idly, chain-smoking, and looking bland. Bob was expounding on semantics, and arguing with Ted about the matter. I was quietly meditating over an Old-Fashioned and simply listening. I think Sam was reading a book.

My eyes wandered over the scene. The sun was still above the horizon, for this was summer and daylight-saving. A soft light filled the view, the trees were lush and green. I could see the shingled rooftops of the houses down below us, and very far

away the towers of Manhattan. I watched the bus come to a halt at the base of our path, and I saw a man descend, glance up at our house, and start slowly up the path.

"Here comes Evan," I remarked. Eyes swivelled around for a moment to watch our friend make his way up. Evan Carey was not one of the original gang, but he was a good scout. He had sort of joined our clique about seven years ago and had fitted like a glove. We all liked him. He was full of humor and always in good spirits and could roar out an argument like a bull.

Even Carey was the editor of two science-fiction pulps, both doing nicely. He was one of those who loved fans and delighted to attend fan meetings and make speeches. We watched him toiling slowly up the hill. I thought to myself that he didn't look well.

He seemed, even from that distance, somewhat pale and hesitant. He climbed steadily, slowly, but his face lacked its usual smile. He passed around the bend and reached our door. When he came in, my observations were confirmed.

Evan Carey was looking pretty bad—for him. He seemed to have lost a little weight, or at any rate, he seemed peaked. . .like a man who had not slept for three nights. His face was paler, instead of its usual ruddy color. He failed to give us his usual cheery greeting and bantering opening. He just looked around a bit, tired, and then slumped into a chair.

"You must have been making a day of it, Evan," said Sam. "Yeah, you look like the last rose of summer," put in Ted.

Evan looked at them, looked at us all. He shook his head a bit, wearily. "I dunno. I don't feel so good. I should have gone to bed, I suppose, but I felt that I had to come out here and warn you boys."

I looked at him sharply. "Warn us? What's up?"

He ran a hand nervously over his cheek. "Why, nothing, nothing, but just the same. . ."

He took the drink that Fred handed him, sipped at it, put it down, squirmed a bit. "You know," he started to say, "this science-fiction. . ."

He sort of let his voice peter out, took another sip.

"Letting it get you down, eh?" said Bob.

He shook his head. "No, no, nothing like that," he muttered. "Just that—oh well—it's just that—you know, it might start something."

"Start what?" I said sharply. "Pull yourself together, man! What the hell are you talking about?"

He looked up at me. "Well, you know. . .Science-fiction. It deals with all sorts of strange things. I got to thinking today. Suppose there really were intelligent creatures on other planets?"

I shrugged impatiently. "We've been over that a thousand times. What about it?"

"Well," he said hesitantly, "well, suppose they were able to come here,

and suppose they knew how skeptical most people would be. . ."

Again he broke off, his face twitched nervously, he took another peck at his cocktail glass. Continued:

"Maybe the only people that would be willing to believe them would be science-fiction fans? Maybe?" More hesitation. "And where would be the first place to look for fans?" A slow breath. "In an office where they publish the stuff. Science-fiction editors. Maybe they'd go to see science-fiction editors first."

He looked around at us, as if glad to get that out. Fred shrugged, lit another cigarette. "*I* haven't met any, and I'm an editor," he said.

"I'll tell my switchboard girl to keep an eye out for bug-eyed monsters," said Bob.

"Someone been up to visit you?" asked Ted, who was only a writer.

Evan Carey glanced at him hastily. "No, no. Of course not. But I was only thinking about it. Still it was awful odd this afternoon."

"What was odd?" I asked. In heaven's name, what was the matter with him, I thought. I had never seen him act so shaken up, so uncertain.

"Why, the. . .the thing, the idea. I thought I should warn you. . ." Evan took another sip, sort of made a face, sat on the edge of his chair, jumpy.

I was looking out the window for a moment. Another bus was drawing to a stop. I saw someone get off. Another of our friends, I supposed. Evan Carey must have watched my eyes, for he leaned forward, staring sharply.

"Excuse me," he said suddenly and stood up. We all looked up at him. He put down his glass, turned, and went out the room into the kitchen.

"Now, what's eating him?" Fred said. We were puzzled. I was wondering just what had happened to make Evan so jittery.

My eyes went to the window again. The man who had gotten off the bus was now toiling up the hill, swiping at nearby bushes with his hand, and whistling. I thought my eyes would pop out. I just sat and stared.

The others must have noticed my agitation, for there was dead silence as they followed my staring eyes. All five pairs of eyes in our room watched the figure of Evan Carey climb the path to the door of Borderland House. He was ruddy-faced, hale, and bustling with energy. He must have noticed us, for he waved a hand and hollered.

We heard his halloo through the glass. With one accord, all five of us turned and made a dash for the kitchen. But the other Evan Carey was gone.

Do you really think that a visitor from space would visit a science-fiction editor first? And in what disguise?

THE END

Special Features

The MAN From TOMORROW

Personals

Letters

Other Worlds Book Shelf

THIS special section of OTHER WORLDS is for your own participation and enjoyment. Here you will find your letters to the editor; your jokes (for which we will pay $1 each); your personal messages to your fellow readers (published free); reviews of science fiction books worthy of your attention; the latest news of what's going on in the world of authors, editors, rival magazines, fan clubs, even individual readers; your bookshop; cartoons; fact articles; interviews with individuals in the public eye and many others. If you have any suggestions as to improvements and additional features, remember your word is our golden rule.

Editorial

(Continued from page 5)

your telaug.

All kidding aside, though, it gives us a real editorial thrill to have the man who experienced perhaps America's greatest modern adventure drop into our back yard. This editing business isn't so dull as you might imagine.

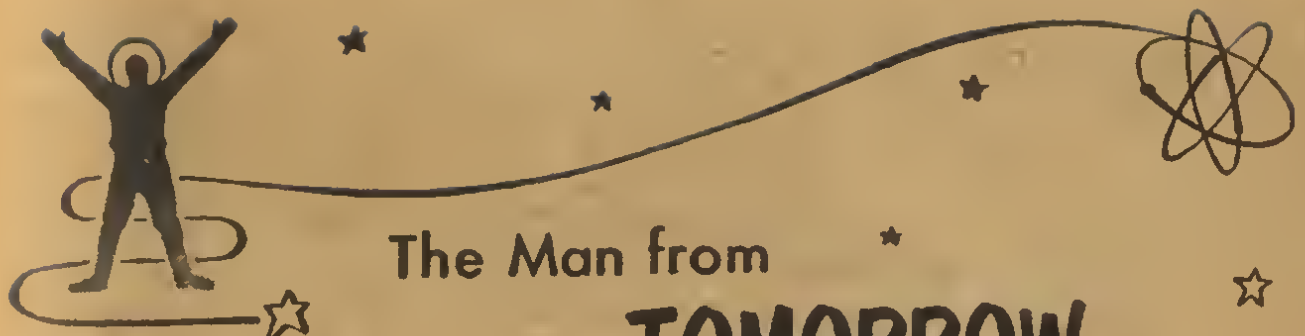
It is with a certain sense of nostalgia that we receive the news that Ziff-Davis will convert *Amazing Stories* to digest size with its April-May issue, and go bi-monthly. Also that *Fantastic Adventures* will be combined with *Fantastic*. We gave personal birth to *Fantastic Adventures*, and with its new garb, it isn't the same old girl! However, progress is a hard taskmaster, and in her new dress, sales are *four times* what they were in the old. Maybe we were right that night we went up to Howard Browne's house, emptied his bottle of pinch-bottle scotch, and told him he was a writer, from this day forth . . . Another example of taking a furniture credit man out of his job and recognizing his real talent. I'm mighty proud of Howard. And prouder still to know that he can outsell his mentor two to one!

What it all means is that Rap has decided it is his move. So we're going to get back into the game of slapping our pupils over the knuckles with our ruler—in a playful sort of way—and show them all the tricks in the bag haven't been dragged out yet. Maybe we'll ask you to remember that, two years from now . . .

Let's do something unusual. Let's ask the readers of the new *Fantastic* and the new *Amazing* to direct their fan letters to *this* editor, rather than to Howard Browne. You can send Howard a carbon, if you wish, but after all, he's got the answer to his question—and we want some *new* answers. If you'll promise to do this, we'll promise to do something about it. Maybe there are things you don't like about the new thing in science fiction, maybe there are things you like very much. A combination of the two might result in still better magazines all around. And doesn't this strike you as a right underhanded way of competition? A real delightful dirty trick? A card off the bottom, so to speak? It'll keep Howard on his toes—and when Howard's on his toes, it is both beautiful, and productive of good things—and what's wrong with that!

And with that we lay down our poison typewriter for this month!

Rap



The Man from TOMORROW

BEFORE we make any predictions for this month, we'll print a couple of letters we received. First:

675 Delano Avenue
San Francisco 12, California
October 17, 1952

Dear Mr. Palmer,

In regard to the "Man From Tomorrow" November issue, you made a statement that California would continue to experience more earthquakes. Well as you probably know by now the city of San Francisco has just had a big one. That's one point in favor of that prediction coming true.

Sincerely yours,
Gilbert E. Menicucci

Maybe we didn't read the paper that day! News that there was a San Francisco earthquake came as a surprise to us. Not because it happened, but because we missed hearing of it. However, it couldn't have been such a big one, at least in damage. And here we want to say that regarding predictions, there is a tendency to "make" them come true, both on the part of the predictor and on the part of the receiver of the prediction. Let's not go overboard in this way. When we predicted a San Francisco earthquake, we weren't referring to one of the minor quakes that happen at the rate of 80 or more a day, but to a real shocker. One that goes down on the books that record the big quakes of history.

Another letter:

Mr. Palmer (man from tomorrow):

I read your feature in the Nov. issue of OW for the first time. I would like to state that I agree with most of your predictions, 75%. 25%, however I would like you to know my opinion on. First the one that says: The earth will be found to be peopled by beings whose existence was never before suspected. These beings will NOT be our species, but will be intelligent.

I take it that you are speaking of beings of the flying saucers. Now let us take it for granted that there are intelligent beings some place in or around our galaxy that has developed space travel. Oh, you say the saucers were built here on Earth and the be-

ings thot fly these machines haven't decided whether to reveal themselves or not. You didn't say that either. Then you must mean there is an intelligent species in some unexplored spot on Earth. Are they more or less intelligent than human beings? How long do you think before this discovery will be made? In any case I think you're wrong. If you would narrow your statement down to what you think the beings ore like ond where they come from I could tell you why I think you're wrong in your prediction, as is I could get a good start on a book obout the answer to why I think you're wrong.

I think you're also wrong about there being no third world war. It is what I would call a sure thing. To try for peace there will be wars however. wor is not the answer There will be no peace. I will not disagree with your other predictions as they all seem correct, excepting the two I spoke of. Rest ossured they will not *come to pass.*

Now I would like to give you a few predictions thot will come to pass. There will be no space travel by 1960. They might begin to progress some in the early '80's Before the moon is reached there will be several hundred deaths, before o successful round trip is made there will be even more deaths. Longevity (o method of) will be discovered before space trovel is well developed.

Ray Carmichael
508 Woodland
Houston 9, Texos

The discovery of these intelligent beings has already been made. They have both been seen and heard. They have been heard by radar and seen by radar, and they have been seen by pilots who go on up above 50,000 to 80,000 feet in the most recent of test jets. We will even go so far as to say that no pilot who goes above 50,000 feet can AVOID seeing them.

That should give you one of your answers—these beings (at least as intelligent as we) inhabit our atmosphere. From 10 miles up to 50 miles they exist in incredible numbers. Their existence will be proved to everybody very shortly.

They are not human beings, i.e., they are not shaped like us. But they have a very human intelligence. They do not think like a cat or a dog, whose thinking is directed solely by instinct toward eating, sex, and still more eating.

As for the Third World War, it will never happen. But as for Koreas and continual states of emergencies they will occur continually, driving mankind almost to distraction—and most certainly toward economical ruin. History will not record another war in the sense that it can be said to begin here and end there.

The war in Korea will end on the 12th of January, 1954

It will be the bitterest peace treaty ever signed. It will bring satisfaction to no one.

Starvation in India (and in several other parts of Asia) will make the mass starvations of 1952 seem trivial in 1953 and 1954.

personals

Will trade any 3 of the following mags for any 1 UNKNOWN WORLDS in good condition: AS—July & Aug '40, Sept & Oct '39, Dec '38 (no back cover), June & Aug. '38 (no covers); aSF—June '52, May '50, Dec '47, Oct '46, Dec '41 & Mar '40 (without front covers); WT—July '33 (without covers); SS—Nov '41 (no covers); PS—Spr '42 (contains "Star Mouse" by Brown); Popular Science—Jan '48; TWS—Aug '37 (front cover ripped). John Lango & Raymond Oakes. 10412 Wilsey Ave, Tujunga, Calif . . . *Want penpals 13 or 14 years old. Have for sale: "Tarzan and the Ant Men," "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar," "Return of Tarzan," "Tarzan the Terrible," "The Beasts of Tarzan" and "Tarzan the Untamed." All pre 1920 ed. except "Tarzan the Untamed." Also for sale, "Lost on the Moon" by Rockwood and "Behind the Flying Saucers" by Scully. Will buy "A Martian Odyssey and Others" by Weinbaum and Mechanix Illustrated for May 1952. Richard Monaco, 3764 Bronx Blvd, New York 67, NY* . . . Would enjoy corresponding with other readers, and promise to answer all letters. I am 17 and a high school senior. Edwin H. Neave, Kyuquot, B C, Canada . . . *Wanted: All Madge; pre '52 aSF; OW 1 thru 4. Send list and prices wanted. Donald Kuske, 421 15th Ave S, Fargo. N Dak* . . . Would like to sell Galaxy collection. Have all issues up to May '52, and all novels up to #9. Will also sell Skalnate Plaso Star Atlas, $3.50; good condition, orig. $5. Susanna Spier, 3 Rosemer St, Rye, NY . . . *Jack Feinberg, 17, of 1954 E 29 St, Brooklyn 29, NY would like to correspond with boys and gals his own age* . . . Want Oct & Nov '51 aSF containing Hal Clement's "Iceworld." Jimmie Adams, 1413 Ohio, Point Pleasant. W Va . . . Wanted: *OW 1-4 and Fate, 21-28. Will pay 50c each for OW; 20c each for FATE. James Lewis, RR #4, Trenton, Tenn* . . . M. McNeil, 2010 McClendon, Houston 25, Texas: Am selling half of my pb collection; includes MURDER MYSTERY MONTHLY, an Armed Services edition, etc. 37 titles, all for $7.50. Also have PRECIOUS PERCELAIN, ex lib Bell to sell at $1.75 or swap for SILVER NUTMEGS, Corley. Shiel's INVISIBLE VOICES, near mint first at $4.00. aSF 11/31, scraped along spine, otherwise excellent at $1.25 . . . *Wanted: daily and Sunday Buck Rogers comics from #1 to Sept '45. Will pay postage and 10c per 25*

Sunday or 5c per 20 daily. Write first stating what you have and weight of package. Will pay $12 for PS, Vol I #1 thru Vol III #2 in good condition. Glen W. Price, Jr, Rt 3, Box 119, Poulsbo, Wash . . . Will sell perfect copies of Gernsback mags. 1926-33; list on request. Want to buy certain fanzines: Spacewarp, Quandry, Odd, Fantasy Advertiser, etc. Also want pre-1947 mags in mint condition, send list. Am interested in contacting stf readers/fans in Suffolk Co., Long Island. F. M. Dietz, Jr., 156 W. Main St., Kings Park, N Y . . . *Will pay 5c each for the following comics: Action, #1-30; Detective. #1-80; Adventure, #1-50; More Fun, #1-90; All-American, #1-60; Flash, #1-40; Sensation, #1-65; Star Spangled, #1-70. Will trade WT, Sept & Nov '51 for OW, #1 & 2. Ted E. White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St, Falls Church, Va* . . . Alfred Guillory, Jr., Box 83, Chataignier, La. wants Tarzan Sunday color comics for 1940 thru '47 and '48 prior to Nov. 21. 10c/25 and 40c/100. Want daily Tarzan comics of any dates. Will pay 15c/125 and 60c/500. Want Sparkler Comics, #1thru 86 and Tarzan Comics #1, 2 & 4 in good condition . . . *Wanted: Jan. Feb & Apr '52 Galaxy. Have recent s-f mags and pb's to trade for slick mags. Send haves and wants to Jim Winters, 5926 Oakwood, Wichita, Kansas* . . . Would like to correspond with anyone who shares an equal interest in flying saucers, also will appreciate any news clippings on the Things; will acknowledge all of them. By the way, anyone know of any flying saucer clubs? M. Briant Miller, 1420 S. Ridgeley Dr., Los Angeles 19, Calif . . *Wanted: pre '48 aSF. Will buy, or trade for recent aSFs or pulps or '39 TWS, SS, AS or '42-'44 Captain Future or some recent pulps. Will also consider selling these mags. Send list of aSF haves, and quote prices if you don't care to trade. All mags are in good to excel condit. Eddie Quo, 190 Hot Springs Rd, Santa Barbara, Calif* . . . Need OW 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 16; will trade Vargo Statten stf novels for them. Also have Roy Sheldon's "Gold Men of Aureus" and Astron Del Martia's "Interstellar Espionage." Have some mint AS to trade for Captain Future, aSF, TWS, SS and Unknown. Arthur Brandwein, 306 W 100 St, NY 25, NY . . .*Will sell or trade for novels and slicks, over 150 pulps, many from '41. FFM, FA, AS, Captain Future, Astonishing, Super Science, SFQ, Future and many more. Want stf books, astronomy, horror & ghost stories, Doc Savage, aSF, Unknown, Horror Tales, Avon Fantasy Reader and pb's. Write for list of mags. Paul Nowell, 6528 Gentry Ave, No. Hollywood, Calif* . . . St Petersburg stf club Infinity is now a correspondence club. Interested fans please write Edith Lois Heilweil, 2127 8 Ave N, St. Petersburg, Fla . . . *For sale: over 125 stf items, including mags from '48 thru '52, Br Mags, pbs and Br pbs, a few books, and one copy of "The New Adam" which will go to the highest bidder or at a lower price with the largest volume order of other*

items. Write for list. Carl H. Geist. 2323 W Ainslie St, Chicago 25, Ill . . . Want first 18 issues of Galaxy and first 9 Galaxy Novels. Send list, condition and price wanted. John Cutkosky, 5004 Davenport St, Omaha 3, Nebr . . . *We are 15 and would like to correspond with stf fans all over the world. Freida Suchovsky, 412 Water St, Clinton, Mass and Jane Bianchi, 76 Birch St, Clinton, Mass* . . . Allen Klinger, 917 Ogden Ave, NY 52, NY will sell complete or near-complete files of Galaxy, Galaxy Novels. F&SF. OW. MADGE and aSF '47 up (most mint). Sold only by entire files. or aSF by years . . . *For sale or trade; TWS Dec '47; SS Feb & May '52; FSM Spr '52. Ted Lenoire, Walhachin. B. C., Canada* . . . Anyone desiring fan correspondents from England or wishing to trade US mags for UK mags write: Contact Bureau, David Rike. Box 203, Rodeo. Calif and enclose 3c stamp for reply . . . *Want original 1-2 page short stories and cartoons for fanzine. For full info write Larry Balint, 3255 Golden Ave, Long Beach 6, Calif* . . . Would like pen-fen between the ages of 12 and 14. Tom Piper. 464 19th St, Santa Monica, Calif . . . *I publish and edit Variant World for a stf correspondence club, The Variants, and need material very badly, especially articles. Shel Deretchin, 1234 Utica Ave, Brooklyn 3, N Y* . . . Have large collection of novels. stf novels and stf mags to sell or trade. Write for list, and send want list and trade list. Gene McDade, Box 192. Rt 1. Belen. New Mex . . .

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WANTED

The Man, or Woman, who is foolish enough to miss the April issue of OTHER WORLDS—because *Myshkin* will be in it! Your reward will be the experience of your science-fiction life! (Remember! April 1953)

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LETTERS

CLARK PUBLISHING COMPANY, 806 DEMPSTER STREET, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Noah W. McLeod

I am much interested in the type of Cosmology that you seem to be pushing in certain recent articles in *Other Worlds* and in Shaver's current serial "the Sun Smiths." The only trouble is that it won't work. If an alternative Cosmology to the present Copernican one is to be found, I am afraid it must be on totally different lines than those proposed by Shaver in "The Sunsmiths."

Judged from what I have read in *Other Worlds*, the Shaver-Palmer Cosmology rests upon the idea that unknown extensions of the upper atmosphere, by distorting the course of light rays through several degrees, effect the appearance of the part of the Cosmos outside of the Earth's atmosphere to such an extent as to give a false impression of the distances and sizes of the heavenly bodies. Unfortunately, in order to produce such an effect, the atmosphere would have to be so sharply divided into layers of different density that the divisions could not maintain themselves permanently. And we do know a lot about the behavior of gases.

Another fact is that the distance of the Sun and Moon can be found through non-optical methods. These methods involve the tides, and give distances which are the same as those given by optical methods. Therefore, the scale of the Solar System as given in Astronomy books must be roughly correct.

It is my suggestion that you change the words, "Other Worlds, Science Stories" on your heading to "Other Worlds, Fantasy Fiction." Most of the published material in your magazine shows such a disregard of science that it is hardly to be considered Science Fiction.

Box 56
Christine, N. Dak.

Maybe the reason your tidal measurements agree with your optical measurements is because the same magnetic-gravitational force field intervenes in both cases. What bends the light rays, also effects the gravitational pull and the tides. As for sharply divided layers, they do exist. They reflect various things, like radio waves, light waves, etc. So you're wrong there. As for disregarding science, how about when we disregarded the "fact" that our atmosphere extended out only 600 miles, and that the higher you got, the colder? Actually, it extends thousands of miles further, and the higher, the hotter?

You are mistaking a lot of science for fact, when it should be labeled theory. Let's change the labels on a lot of things before we go changing OTHER WORLDS to conform. We just don't conform to a lot of theory. We dare to express our own!—Rap.

A. C. Alexander

I think I've hit upon the meaning of stf. It is really very simple, stf is a literature which deals with logical possibilities for future worlds, written in a way which entertains, and is thought provoking, while at the same time educates, (though not necessarily). It educates because of the fact that *stf* has to be scientifically correct, and logical!

This definition is *not* for so called "off-trail" fantasy, science-fantasy, or weird, *but for SCIENCE-FICTION alone!* The definitions for these are quite varied, and different.

Science-fantasy does not have to be logical, or scientifically correct. It is about worlds of the future, but where the known facts of today are twisted and altered to suit the author's fancy. Science-fantasy is different than stf in that it doesn't have to be possible. but semi-possible, though entertaining, but by no means educational.

Fantasy and weird stories are neither logical or educational. All they do is to entertain the reader. They don't in any way have to be logical, or possible. In this type of story it is possible for the author to move to unlimited fields of imagination, and change and twist scientific (or non-scientific) facts as he wishes them to be.

Now I'm not saying that this *is* the right definition, but I do believe that it hits closer to the truth, than the other ones I've read and heard to date. At least to *me* it seems so, yet to others it may be entirely impossible, and illogical!

I have written this because I believed it would be interesting for others to hear what another fan used for his definition for stf. I hope that you find it possible to run this in your letter column as I'd like to hear comments from other fans on my opinions, so I might see faults in it, and then take the logical steps to change.

I'm also writing to discuss the matter of sex and science-fiction. Of course sex is an important thing in this world, and therefore has a *proper* place in science-fiction. But as I said a PROPER place! *And that isn't on the covers of the mags!*

Sex is ok when used in the proper way and place. Last month there was a story called THE LOVERS in *Startling Stories*, by a new author called Farmer. It dealt with the problem of sex between two different races in a smooth and *clean* way. This of course is not objectionable! With this story the editor had the chance to put a very sexy cover painting on his mag, but much to my surprise he didn't take advantage of it.

Now I'm not pea-minded, when a story calls for a sexy cover ok! But what bothers me, is the fact that editors of stf mags usually have no reason to put a girl on the cover except to sell mags! But the funny thing

about this is, they don't need them on it to sell their mags. For example look around at the other TOP mags, like gSF, aSF, etc., these don't have cover girls on them, and they sell, and very good!

Another thing which bothers me is the fact that girls are put on the moon (or some other place where there is no oxygen) without space suits!—pardon me, but maybe I'm a little dull, but *I can't see how they breathe*—would you mind telling me?

Yours for more science-fiction,

16452 Moorpark Street
Encino, California

Haven't you ever heard of the "breathless beauty?" As for your definitions, they are very well defined! —Rap.

Jane Quirk

I had hoped to get a chance to visit with you at the convention, but every time I saw you when I wasn't on duty, you were surrounded with people . . . and I didn't feel like pushing in. So . . . this will have to do.

I did twit you once (in Registration, on Saturday) about your "Man from Tomorrow's" apparent error regarding Truman . . . and your soft answer disarmed me completely. Your suggestion that Stevenson might be assassinated is most fascinating, although I hope it's wrong. I have a great deal of admiration and affection for the man, and sympathy, too. I think he'd make a great president . . . in 1956. I would have liked to have heard your exposition of that idea . . . when would this assassination take place so that Truman could be President again (heaven forfend!). If after the election, the vice-president would take over (what an idea!)

My idea, for what it's worth, is that Truman would remain president if such an emergency arose that the national elections would have to be . . . postponed . . . until a more auspicious date. Hasn't that happened historically?

At any rate, I'm taking no chances. My hopes are for a better future world . . . where even neighbors can and will get along peaceably. But I'm adding suspenders by learning all the primitive skills that I can. Already I've learned all about raising my own food, I know how to can it for winter use . . . I sew well, and can weave slowly . . . I know how to make my own cooking pots in case of dire need . . . I know some and am learning more about animal husbandry and butchering . . . and I can even make soap.

5413 Fairmont,
Downers Grove, Ill.

It's an interesting idea . . . what if the president-elect were killed before taking office? Would the president in office continue to hold office until a new election, or would the vice-president elect take over on inauguration day? Anybody know the answer to this one? I'm sure sorry you didn't just barge in on me at the convention. Everybody else did. I'd have given you my time, believe me. As for when Stevenson would have to

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be assassinated in order to make my prediction come true, it would have to be before election, so that a new candidate would have to be selected. But of course, as you read this, it's all over, and The Man From Tomorrow, who was only aiming at a gamble, was wrong. As for your developing your talents the way you are, bravo! Let's all get out and do the same! It's a wonderful thing to know how to make soap, believe us!—Rap.

Tom Claresor

The 11th World Science Fiction convention will be held at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel in Philadelphia next Labor Day week end, Sep. 5-7. We have secured the main ballroom, the entire 18th floor, and the well known Clover Room for the various convention activities; but best of all, the Bellevue will give special room rates ($6 single, $10 double) to all convention members. Some talk has also been heard in regard to special facilities for larger groups (such as fan clubs who want suites, adjoining rooms, etc), but nothing definite on that angle yet.

The program, of course, has not yet been set up, but rumor has it again that we're going to try to match Chicago's "first," the s-f ballet. Anyway, when I last spoke with Lester Del Ray, program chairman, and Milt Rothman, his superspecial assistant, the only items that had not yet been suggested at least once for the program were a personal interview with Jules Verne and a concert by the rare winged fungi BEMS of Sirius Four.

Most important item at the moment, of course, is the matter of convention memberships, for after all without fans there can be no convention. Bob Madel, convention treasurer, and Jack Agnew, chairman of the membership committee, will be most happy to receive your dollars; just send them to Box 2019, Philadelphia 3.

So circle the Labor Day week end and get those dollars in for your memberships to Box 2019. See you in Philly in '53.

3731 Spruce Street
Philadelphia 4, Pa.

Ted Sarantos

The Jones' cover painting for the November issue is the best I've seen in four years of reading stf. If the other nine paintings you've bought from him are 7/9 as good, I'll be satisfied. Looking at it made me realize how—sickening (good thing I'm not a swearing man) the formula covers are.

For the unlearned, a formula picture includes a beautiful woman who wears highly stylized clothes with which she would be more comfortable without and almost is; a menace, usually a monster, which is about to destroy her; and a handsome man who is about to save her.

Formula No. 2 has a barren planet or moon with a spaceship in the background and a handful of spacepeople exploring the terrain.

No. 3 shows a spaceship blasting off or about to blast off.

A new (at least to me) formula has several spaceships firing at other spaceships or else spacestations.

This is a formula letter in which you praise the editors magazine so he'll publish your letter.

602 Webster St.
Midland, Mich.

And for this letter, we'll have to make a formula comment: Thanks for all them kind words!—Rap.

Milton Rosenkotter

To me the Editorials, Man of Tomorrow, and other departments of Other Worlds magazine, plus the new covers, are of greater interest than the stories! Keep up the good work.

Read in the early edition of the Chicago *Herald American* (Oct. 12, 1952) of three objects having landed somewhere in Braxton County of West Virginia. They were space craft, or so the article maintained. Could this be one of the announcements of space ships forecast?

Also want to take this opportunity in recommending "The Coming of the Saucers" to anyone who hasn't read it. It is awfully hard to put down once you've started reading. Fascinating, and by far the most interesting account of the "Saucers" I read and I believe I've read just about everything I could on this subject.

Pierce, Nebraska

No, the objects in West Virginia were not space-craft. We suspect they were reporter-craft, and not so crafty at that!—Rap.

Don Wilson

Sending in my change-of-address card today reminded me that I might as well say a few words about what you no doubt wish was your favorite magazine.

I'm sure it's not. It's not mine, either. I will of course admit that at times it shows signs of promise. It even has its good points. But it is, generally speaking, a weak magazine.

Take the constant atmosphere of desperately trying to convince the readers that the stories are good. Why bother? It's just like religion. If one feels faith, he quietly accepts it. Only when he feels insecure does he push his product down his listener's throat.

Let's face it. *Other Worlds* has good covers, it is as attractive as any other magazine. Readers will keep coming back if they like what they find within.

I must regretfully confess that I suspect the editor is more concerned with convincing himself that his favorite babies write good stories than he is with convincing the readers. After all, he has edited magazines long enough to realize the magnitude of strong stories in making a magazine strong.

Take S. J. Byrne's colossal series known as the Colossus series, for instance. It began inauspiciously in Amazing in 1948, with "Prometheus II," and it has continued sporadically in *Other Worlds*. Its fault is the fault common to much of super-concept writing: it gets all carried away with itself, leaves the reader feeling breathless and unenlightened, rushes from

place to place with no time to pause for such things as filling in the background, establishing the characters, or paying attention to the mechanics of story-structure. The effect is like seeing a variety of jets or rockets tearing by. You only glimpse 'em.

I've seen the results of Byrne's activity when he chooses to limit his scope. "The Naked Goddess" was a good story. So was "Children of the Chronotron" (despite its ridiculous title) in a recent issue of one of your better competitors. But "The Golden Guardsmen" wasn't.

Or take another of your boss's pets, comrade Shaver, whose recent "The Sun Smiths" was the focus of much editorial fog. Here was an example of the exactly opposite fault from Byrne's epics: a small topic, unduly extended by the addition of much surplus wordage to the dimensions of a novel. It shouldn't have been. It should have been maybe 20, 25 thousand words long.

I'll be interested to see whether Shaver does better when he returns to his original element in the current serial. My impression is that he'll always be longwinded, however.

Or take Baby Number Three, the biggest discovery of them all, the great Rog. Reason I never wrote you before on the subject of "These Are My Children" was that I had nothing else on my mind, and that alone wasn't worthy of correspondence. But my fertile imagination has now conceived a worthy letter-plot, and it now unfolds its membranous wings and flaps forth, Evanstonwards.

Once upon a time, when I wrote science-fiction criticisms for fanzines under the name of Gilbert Swenson, I was obsessed with the idea that Rog Phillips ought to sort out his ideas, develop each of 'em, and make himself a craftsman, instead of one who spewed forth superconcepts.

Those were the days of "The Despoilers," and "So Shall Ye Reap," and "Battle of the Gods," and the other stories which made RPG famous.

In "Children" he rode one theme, with many words and much complex action among his characters. He rang the bell, too, but rather without much of a bong. Somehow, I must confess that I preferred the old Phillips—a stupid remark, in these latter days, but still one that I must make.

To get back to the magazine, I'd like to mention, in view of stories, my agreement with one of your recent letter-writers who said, "Why buy tripe just because it's long?" In other words, why not steer clear of stuff like "Sun Smiths" and "The Golden Guardsmen" — which can't stand on its own merits? I would have bought "These Are My Children," all right, its weaknesses aside. I would have bought "Act of God." But I'd have rejected the others.

I most sincerely hope that QW is not going to turn into an organ for Shaver and Byrne manuscripts that no other editor would buy! If "in

OW, the story's the thing," as a recent editorial states, then stop buying authors' names and start buying stories. Write 'em yourself if there are none to be had.

And let's consider the editor's last problem-child—himself. Let's look at his column, "Nebulosities," his "The Man From Tomorrow," and the rest of his much ado about nothing. Let's consider all the space he wastes on his own meanderings, which aren't nearly as either interesting or mature as the ones he used to write for Amazing before the Lemurian invasion, and which could be profitably junked in favor of good fiction. Let's make a comparison with aSF, which blows none, or with GALAXY, whose editor uses at most 2½ pages per issue for his own white heat.

If my arm were twisted, I might admit that the editorials are interesting enough (though I'd prefer them not so obviously juvenile-slanted). But I will never consent to swallow the Fortean and Shaverite features.

In short, I'd like to see a magazine wherein the editor doesn't need to point ecstatically at two or three forthcoming items which ARE like "Please Me Plus Three" and "Track of the Beast" as the exception to the run of Shaverian, Caravanian, and Byrneian (Germain only) tripe. I'd rather see an editor, who, like the editor of aSF, remains quietly confident that the *tripe* is the exception, and needs not wax ecstatic trying to prove that it's not really tripe, after all. I have faith this will come—remember, I subscribed. But let's not waste time on ape-men who never *will* learn how to write out of their element. Let's let Shaver write shorter stories, which he does well. Let's get Byrne off the one-way blind alley of the Germain series. And let's abandon charity! The story's the thing; not the friendship of an inept writer!

Lest you suspect I have nothing good to say at all about good old *Other Worlds*, let me say that during the past year, I've been most favorably impressed by a few things.

Thing Number One, as you might suspect, is the covers. All of them have been good except the January cover.

Thing Number Two is the thinner paper, which is a most excellent (and long overdue) innovation.

Thing Number Three is the few mature and thoughtful ideas that Boss Editor sees fit to let himself express amid his welter of vaporings which really are beneath him: his ideas on the place of religious thinking in science-fiction, for example, and on religion itself, and on the true nature of the appreciation of beauty. These are worthy.

And remember that I agree with the editor's own statement: "It takes a lot of words to develop a theme with any guts in it at all." Let's just not waste words developing a theme which *doesn't* have any guts in it, or on a theme which merits no words at all.

An idle query: Why isn't OTHER WORLDS copyrighted?

Bea, you gorgeous creature you, I

must say I muchly approve of the way you editorialized in the midst of other people's writings (an atrocious practice) to defend "The Demolished Man." Yea, Bester is the equal of the great Sturgeon, and has penned the story of the decade. I love you, Bea!

"Hell," he said, "that would be easy . . ."

833 Ocean Ave.
Santa Monica, Calif.

This letter-reply will take up space, lots of it, but as you say, "lets face it." So we have an atmosphere of "desperately trying to convince readers the stories are good?" Would you have us say they are bad? (we're being ridiculous, so don't answer that!) Or would you have us imitate Campbell and blow not at all? Except we disagree—Campbell advertises his type of stories fully as much as we do.

But to get to the real meat of your criticism of our "blowing," you say this editor (Rap) is trying to convince himself *that his favorite babies write good stories. This isn't the first time this has been said. Even Bea says the same thing at times, and adds that we are "soft-hearted" as well. Don, if you were editor, would you sit behind your desk and with a wave of your hand crush the hopes and ambitions of a writer who crosses your desk with a "first timer" by acidly saying: "Go dig ditches, you can't write!" Maybe I'm soft-hearted. But maybe, too, I have learned something about people. None of us are born with any abilities at all. With talents, yes, but not with ability, which must be acquired. All of us have God-given talents, and these talents urge us toward certain efforts. And if those efforts are coldly rejected, we turn inward on ourselves, develop frustrations, wind up "digging ditches" or anything else for which we have no "talent." Is an editor God, that he can decide on the basis of "ability" which has not yet been acquired, that the "talent" does not exist? Is "talent" so obvious that it can be seen at first glance? How DO we see talent in anyone? Let's take Shaver for our "horrible" example. Yes, we know he can't write. He can't even type. His manuscripts make one shudder to look at, and are the despair of typesetters. He cannot spell, That is, he does not spell correctly, because the typewriter does not write it correctly, and he figures "to hell with it, let the editor fix it." Exasperating? Of course. Enough to make any editor throw his manuscript right back at him. Grammar? No, he knows nothing about it. He uses verbs as adjectives, nouns as verbs, and on and on, absolutely driving copy-readers mad. He can't plot. He winds up stories where he gets "stuck" and fires in the lousiest ending, knowing it is lousy, but despairing of his ability to "fix" it. Again, he says: "maybe the editor can fix it up, or tell him how to fix it, in which case I'll do it over."*

Then why did we ever fool with Shaver? ONE THING ONLY, his UNUSUAL IMAGINATION. His strange sense of the unusual, his feel-

ing for emotion, his sense of the beautiful and his sense of the outre.

This editor has never been one to shirk work. What is an editor, anyway, if he wants only to sit behind a desk, accept only perfect manuscripts to which he has no need to add even a comma, and wind up taking credit for a successful magazine to which he has contributed nothing more than any single reader of that magazine, reading the stories, and liking the obviously likable? Shaver is hard work. He irks, he vexes, he infuriates. And we encouraged him as we do anyone who shows his HONEST talents, and not his FRUSTRATED misdirections. He is not alone. Rog Phillips could not write when he first wrote us a threatening letter in Amazing Stories' *Discussions. Yeah, believe it or not, he threatened to kill us of we did not stop the Shaver Mystery! We sent him a check for $500.00 to* come and do it! *Actually we detected an UNUSUAL mental slant on fiction, and we thought maybe we could make a writer out of still another man with a talent.*

How does an editor get writers? WAIT UNTIL THEY SHOW UP? Are writers BORN? And is it then a COMPETITION to get them into your own stable? Don, you have a surprise coming. There are no BORN writers. ALL ARE MADE. By some editor, or some circumstance—but the fact is, they BECOME WRITERS because they get the opportunity to develop the ability *to exercise their* talent *in a constructive manner. It just so happens that this editor isn't the type of pirate, or the type of imitator, or the type of competitor who keeps eyeing the writer who has already developed his talent, has acquired the ability, which, after all, is only EXPERIENCE. Have you ever applied for a job you'd really like to do, because you know you'd love it, have a talent for it, but didn't get it because the boss asked what EXPERIENCE you'd had? Well, the boss who insists on experience, insists on USING UP THE AVAILABLE SUPPLY OF ABILITY, and will inevitably wind up with no EXPERIENCED HELP in existence.*

We've done it time and again—we've given new talent a chance to gain experience, and then ALLOWED THEM TO SLIP THROUGH OUR FINGERS to the other editors. And within ten years, we've seen them go into a grave of "has-been." Because the new editors were too lazy to exercise their talent at editing! What we're saying here is that those editors had no ABILITY, no experience, at what I feel editing really is. And when such an unprogressive, staid VIEWPOINT comes into the picture as competition, I've always found it to be amazingly innocuous—easy as pie to beat out when it comes to the big circulations, the profitable enterprises, the NEW ideas and advances in the field.

So, we aren't trying to convince ourselves. We KNOW. And a very few of the men we gave the only chance they would ever have, considering the OTHER men at the helms

of science fiction magazines, stuck with us. Most of them became too big for their britches, felt embarrassed at remaining in the company of new *initiates with little ability, became satisfied that they were as great as we encouraged them to be, and went off seeking the gold that glitters, the BIG-TIME. And some of them cast a sneer over their shoulders at us, remaining back there doing our editing, exercising our same old ability.*

How many times have writer and editor friends of mine asked me why I don't TRY to hit the BIG-TIME with my talents at writing? They say I should be in the POST. Do you know how to get in the POST? Well, this is how: imitate! And quite frankly, Ray Palmer doesn't like to imitate. And he intends to develop his own talent, gain his own idea of ability, and he bets he'll win many a race—but they'll be on long-shots, on dark horses, on entries nobody gave a chance!

But your letter reveals you do not understand that, or you wouldn't so misinterpret Shaver, Byrne, Phillips . . . or OW, or Amazing, when I had it, or even my own writings.

Don't you think I KNOW the faults in Byrne's writing? In Shaver's? In Phillips? They haven't yet begun to touch on the vast store of experience possible to them. But I say that at least ONE of these three men will make a mark on the world that won't easily be forgotten. Shaver has made a mark (aside from science fiction of course) that will live centuries. He has made a lot of people think. Maybe they abandoned his concepts after awhile, but they never forgot where they got their NEW ones. They never forgot that it was Shaver made them think in the first place. Phillips has been a nine-day-wonder, alternating with a horrible flop. He has EXPERIMENTED. Some of the results weren't good, some were sensational. But the experience he has gained!

Editing, Don, isn't what you think it is. Editing isn't what most editors think it is. Most editors are editors because it was the job they managed to land, and the money they earn keeps them in it! The money, not the joyous exercise of their talent and the grateful acquiring of ability in that talent.

So, when we say Byrne has a story coming up that is terrific, we are not blowing horns in fear of the dark. We are saying: At last our editing ability has paid off!

Meanwhile we will continue to search for new talent, direct it into the paths of ability, and darned if we won't produce a very good magazine while doing it.

We suggest that the three writers you've pulled apart read your letter carefully, and take some of your rather brutal comments to heart. We think they'll learn something about writing, even from you! After all, you are a reader, and the old command "Know Thyself" has another which applies to writers: "Know Thy Reader!"

Now, the last item, the "problem child" . . . myself. Juvenile, you say

I am. Don, how old are you? Under 50? Then you are juvenile. Were you at the Convention? Predominantly juvenile. And strangely, a lot of very ADULT people. A wonderful mixture. A very hopeful mixture. A VERY encouroging mixture. Why? Because those adults were MOSTLY people who were exceptionally INEXPERIENCED and UNTALENTED when I first met them years ago! So mony of them would be forced to sov: "I first come into this scene becouse of Ray Polmer."

Yes, I'm a problem child, even to myself. I look at life with an eagerness to learn everything I con. but not just to learn. To be able to DO, is my ambition. I hove certain tolents, but I realize humbly they are extremely minor, and very rore. I om forced, because of lack of real tolent, to WORK to develop abilities to compensate. I wont to MAKE things. With my honds ond my brain I want even to know how to CREATE A WORLD and be ABLE to do it. I wont to live billions on uncounted billions of vears, ond WORK ALL THE TIME. I want to face problem ofter problem, more difficult than before. I wont to strive to my utmost. And when I've finished a thing, I want it to be a source of happiness to my fellow man. And, Don, I don't want to be paid for it. I want to give it as a gift to those I love, you people, readers, writers, editors, fellow workers. And right there you have the answer to the question so many of my more "famous" contemporaries have osked: Why hoven't I tried to sell the Post, or write a really good book? Because they infer, when they say it, thot I should do it BECAUSE OF THE WEALTH IT WOULD BRING ME. You know Don, just recently, although half parolyzed, I learned how to run a troctor, ond a better woy of digging out quack grass, the bane of all farmers. And I learned how to harness a creek with a dam, so thot it wouldn't overflow in a cloudburst.

If I only had the TALENT of a Shaver, of a Phillips, of a Byrne! But sadly, I hove to do it the hard way, bumbling olong, making mistakes, hobnobbing with the "low-coste"

Lastly, you mention Bec Mahoffey. Well, she's another example of whot I've been saving. When I met her at the Cincinnoti Convention, she wos just a fan She knew NOTHING about editing. She kneu nothing about what made a magazine a success, or whot coused it to fail. She knew nothing obout editing a monuscript. She had not one whit of EXPERIENCE. And vet I threw her headlong into a job thot fote added to with quite a push (by knocking me out of the picture) and let her make oll the mistakes she wanted to. Today, if you read the mosthead, she's full editor along with me. And Don, she's not only beoutiful but she's a terrific editor. That is, she will be in a couple more yeors She's a triple-threat for tomorrow, and other staf mags had better look to their laurels. One thing I know, Don, I can drop dead today, and OW will go on, and you reoders will still love

it, as much, if not more.

And Don, I'm not "hauling you over the coals," "taking you down a peg" or "criticizing you." I'm answering your honest letter with an honest reply. And thanks for the opportunity!—Rap.

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

(Continued from page 2)

sands beneath the ancient Arab hill-village of Takrouna, in the Libyan Desert. Temple began the novel again, and this time lost the MS during a bombardment one dark, wet night on Anzio. Considerably daunted, Temple tried a third time. Third time was lucky: the book was finished somewhere in the snowy Alps, brought back to England, and eventually appeared there under the title *Four-Sided Triangle*. It became a slowly growing snowball, next seeing American publication in both hard-cover and pocket-book form, then French and German publication, with an abbreviated version in Spanish, and now an offer has been made for Italian rights and negotiations are in progress for a possible Dutch version. In the meantime, a British film version has just been completed, starring Barbara Payton. (This film will almost certainly have American Exhibition also.)

"Having become fat and lazy on the proceeds of these sales, I would have liked to go on living thus indefinitely without having to do any more writing. But, beginning to run out of languages, I was forced to scribble some more short stories and novelets, which have appeared in THRILLING WONDER STORIES, STARTLING STORIES, OTHER WORLDS, NEW WORLDS, WORLDS BEYOND, WEIRD TALES, etc. *(These scribblings have been chosen for the last two years running to appear in THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1951 and TBSFS: 1952, as well as in several other anthologies.—Ed.)*

"I recently deviated briefly from the field to publish a crime novel called THE DANGEROUS EDGE, and also sat in the editorial chair of a semi-juvenile ANNUAL featuring Britain's leading s-f strip-cartton hero, Colonel Dan Dare. But I prefer the writer's chair to the editor's, and bed to either. Anyhow, I'm old-fashioned, and think H. G. Wells did it all first and best."

OTHER WORLDS

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